

**Transforming Conversations:  
The Voices of Animals in the Interdependent Web**

**A Professional Project  
presented to  
The faculty of the  
Claremont School of Theology**

**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry**

**by  
Beth Ann Johnson**

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This professional project completed by

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has been presented to and accepted by the  
faculty of Claremont School of Theology in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

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## ABSTRACT

### Transforming Conversations: The Voices of Animals in the Interdependent Web

by  
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The notion that reality is relational and interconnected is a worldview that is widely affirmed by scientists, environmentalists, and philosophers. The concept of the interdependent web of existence is often used to characterize this worldview.

Environmental philosophies, such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, and postmodern process thought, affirm the concept of the interdependent web. Each adequately takes into account problems facing ecosystems and species of animals by proposing a deeply relational worldview. Ecofeminism and process thought share deep ecology's critique of the mechanistic, dualistic worldview that has functioned to obscure our relational existence leading to the numerous ecological problems we face today, in addition to global warming, war, and poverty.

However, not all of these positions adequately account for the problem of the human caused suffering of individual animals created by practices such as factory farming, animal testing, the fur trade, and using animals in entertainment, such as circuses. Deep ecology, in particular, which has been very influential in environmental philosophy and ethics, articulates a concept of the interdependent web based on biocentric egalitarianism that has functioned to mask the human-caused suffering of individual animals.

This project analyzes deep ecology, ecofeminism, and process thought for each position's stance on the suffering of individual animals in the interdependent

web. I propose that the combined perspective of ecofeminist process thought, with a critical use of deep ecology, is the best position to highlight the subjectivity of individual animals and the human-caused suffering that individual animals undergo.

Ecofeminist, postmodern, process thought provides the analysis. Process-oriented religious education integrated with relevant practices and exercises from deep ecology provides a praxis model of theory and action that promotes the ethical awareness and spiritual support necessary to act to end the human-caused suffering of nonhuman animals.

This work is directed to environmental activists all types, those religious and those not. My aim is to inspire all people to take compassionate actions to end the preventable suffering of animals.

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## Dedications

This project is dedicated to my two greatest teachers.

To David Ray Griffin, whose knowledge, wisdom, and gracious good humor opened me to myriad manifestations of God and grace.

And to Lil' (August 25, 1995–December 11, 2004), my beloved feline companion and soul mate, whose presence in my life saved it, who broke my heart wide open to show me the meaning of living in Love.

## **Part One: Learning to Hear Differently**

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

#### **Problem Addressed by the Project**

While the notion that reality is relational and interconnected is widely affirmed by scientists, environmentalists, and philosophers, thanks to the practices of factory farming and animal testing, the fur industry, and mistreatment in circuses, the amount of human-caused suffering that nonhuman animals undergo in our world is staggering. The concept of the interdependent web of existence, which is often used to characterize the nature of our interconnectedness (which includes nonhuman animals), provides the basis for and the analysis of many of the solutions to problems we currently face. Global warming, poverty, war, the degradation of ecosystems, and the diminishment and extinction of species of animals reveal the interlocking nature of environmental, economic, and political systems. Environmentalists, both secular and religious, affirm the concept of interdependence, which is a useful and accurate articulation of our existence but does not always function to elucidate the human caused suffering of individual animals. This is the problem this project seeks to solve.

The concept of the interdependent web offers us humans a powerful understanding of our place in relation to the rest of creation. This understanding offers hope and wholeness to those who embrace it. The concept also offers us hope for comprehending and addressing the interlocking issues we face. As a corrective to the mechanistic, dualistic worldview that has prevailed in modernity, it offers us wholeness.

The relational existence characterized by the interdependent web is also a basic tenet of deep ecology that is affirmed by my denomination, the Unitarian Universalist

Association. The seventh of the Unitarian Universalist seven Principles states, “We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” The interdependent nature of existence is likewise affirmed by ecofeminism and process thought, two positions in which I locate myself and from which I write. The compelling vision of the interdependent nature of reality has led us to actions to preserve the environment and species of animals. This vision offers those who embrace it both embodied knowledge and the joy of connection with the rest of nature.

I propose that the concept of the interdependent web also can also function to both highlight and mask the suffering of individual animals. The problem I address in this project is that the concept of the interdependent web has often functioned primarily to mask the human caused suffering and mute the voices of individual animals. The goal of this project is to provide analysis and experiences from the perspective of ecofeminist process thought whereby persons can develop an understanding of the interdependent web of existence that can function to highlight the human-caused suffering that individual animals undergo. A further aim of this project is that it can also inspire us to take compassionate actions to end the preventable suffering of animals.

This work is written from my perspective as a Unitarian Universalist minister, peace activist, and animal liberationist. It is directed to environmental activists of all types—those who are religious or spiritual and those who are not—who wish to understand this problem and act on behalf of animals.

### ***Importance of the Problem***

Complex cultural, philosophical, theological, psychological, social, and economic factors prevent people from grasping the plight of animals. This leads to indifference to,

and/or denial of, the suffering of nonhuman animals caused by our modern life.

Although the efforts of the Humane Societies, animal rights activists, and other agencies and individuals have increased our awareness of the plight of animals, there is much more to be done. But these efforts are often met with derision, dismissal, or denial. As a result, conditions change slowly, and activists engaged in the work often experience burnout and depression.

While there are examples to the contrary, traditional Western theologies and philosophical systems have, for the most part, contributed to the disregard for the well being of other creatures and the earth in general. The relationships between human beings and nonhuman beings and the rest of creation have largely been characterized by a position of dominance by humans. The earth and nonhuman animals have been understood as possessions or property existing solely for either the use or pleasure human beings.

Much has been written in the past thirty to forty years in the fields of theology, philosophy, and science critiquing this worldview, out of which the degradation of the earth and the disregard for the subjectivity and suffering of other beings emerged. The works of feminists, ecofeminists, environmentalists, deep ecologists, and process thinkers reflect these critiques with regard to the nature of patriarchy and Western philosophic thought, out of which have emerged dualistic categories that split matter and spirit, mind and body, man and woman, human and nature. This splitting has led to the perpetuation of interlocking systems of domination. Revelations by science, along with proposals by theologians and philosophers, counter the dualistic, mechanistic worldview by affirming that we exist in an interdependent web and that reality is

relational. Although many people have embraced the relational worldview, many others continue to live as though the earth's resources are endless.

The new sense of interconnectedness has not, however, been consistently extended to nonhuman animals. The facts relating to the subjugation of animals to humans, and their capacity to suffer, have somehow been neglected. Hence, animals can be raised as food in factory farms or used to test cosmetics and cleaning products without regard to their suffering. Many factors contribute to the denial of human-caused suffering in individual animals. This is a denial that thwarts the development of the sensibilities needed to evoke actions on behalf of nonhuman beings. Notions of the self and the body, the economic exigencies of factory farming and the production of goods, and theological and philosophical assumptions that inform these notions and exigencies are woven together in co-implication. Of no small consequence is the overwhelming nature of human-caused suffering of animals and the seeming intractability of the problems.

The enormity of the problem is not only difficult to grasp but even harder to deal with. I suggest that the very concept of the independent web, as understood primarily through deep ecology—which both inspires care for the environment and species and offers a compelling spiritual vision—neglects individual animals. When we deal with the problem of human-caused animal suffering, we face tensions and ambiguities. We wrestle with claims and objections. But when we analyze the tensions, ambiguities, claims, and objections through an ecofeminist, postmodern process lens and combine them with exercises and experiences to internalize the theory, we can learn to take

compassionate actions on behalf of nonhuman animals and spiritually support activists as they engage in their work.

All religious traditions prescribe some sort of compassion toward nonhuman animals. There are also civil laws that prohibit cruelty to animals kept in human domestic care. I believe that all people—those of faith plus those of no particular faith tradition—are morally obliged to engage in a discussion of compassion toward nonhuman animals and to act as faithfully as possible in accordance with what we know about the capacity of nonhuman animals to experience suffering and terror, joy and pleasure. In my Unitarian Universalist tradition, we affirm principles that point the way to an ethos that promotes sympathy for animals. The Seventh Principle says, “We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” The sixth source for Unitarian Universalism is that “spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions...celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.” Both of these statements have the potential to promote actions to prevent unnecessary human-caused suffering instead of masking the pain and muting the voices of nonhuman animals.

The aim of this project is twofold: (1) to motivate environmental and other activists to act on behalf of nonhuman animals and consider their ability to feel *and* suffer, and (2) to provide insights and resources that offer wholeness and hope for those engaged in this work. While I speak of the voices of individual animals in the interdependent web, it is ultimately *bodies* that count, bodies that give voice to those whose voices are not like our own.

### ***Thesis***

Ecofeminist, postmodern process thought integrated with relevant exercises and experiences offers a corrective to the partial understanding of the place of individual animals in the interdependent web of existence advanced by deep ecology.

Ecofeminist, postmodern process thought also promotes the ethical awareness, ecological sensibilities, and support necessary to act to end the human-caused suffering of nonhuman animals.

### ***Definitions of Major Terms***

**Deep ecology:** A form of radical environmentalism that posits the interdependence of all life, with an emphasis on the biosphere, species of animals, and an equality of value among all forms of life.

**Ecofeminism:** Refers to the category of feminism that takes the environment as a category of analysis and concern and provides an analysis of a matrix of oppressions—patriarchy, class, race, and environmental degradation. Many forms of ecofeminism also offer an earth-centered spiritual perspective from a variety of religious traditions, including Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Neo-Paganism, including the Goddess religions.

**Process thought:** Based primarily on the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, refers to the various articulations and elaborations of Whitehead's metaphysical system. This includes philosophy and theology, as well process applications in other areas such as social justice, ecology, organizational management, religious education, and ethics.

**Postmodern process thought:** Sometimes called "constructive postmodern thought." Refers to the articulation of process in overcoming problems of modernity.

**Unitarian Universalism:** A creedless, values-based faith noted for its theological breadth and social justice ethos. The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA) was formed as the result of the consolidation of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America.

**Unitarian Universalist Seven Principles:** Ethical statements adopted by the General Assembly of the UUA that articulate Unitarian Universalist values. The Seventh Principle: [We affirm and promote] “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are part.”

**Unitarian Universalist Sources:** Six sources of faith for Unitarian Universalist, also affirmed and included in the by-laws of the UUA by the General Assembly.

### ***Work Previously Done in the Field***

Extensive work has been done in the fields of environmentalism, ecofeminism, process thought, deep ecology, and animal rights. Of interest for this project are the analysis and integration of insights from each of these fields that I will use to develop an analysis that leads to moral consideration of individual animals and offer resources for the cultivation of hope and wholeness for activists engaged in this work.

Animal rights, or animal welfare positions, as they are sometimes called, have been advanced most prominently by Peter Singer, whose ethical position rests on alleviating the suffering of animals, and Tom Regan, whose ethical position rests on the rights of animals.

Ecofeminism is based on a critique of a modernity that includes patriarchal and anthropocentric assumptions in science, politics, culture and conceptions of nature, along with the mechanistic worldview.



Ecofeminism and process thought also have been in conversation; points of divergence and convergence will be explored in this project. An important area of convergence, which is of great significance to this project, is that of *worldview*. In his introduction to the SUNY series on Constructive Postmodern Thought, David Ray Griffin expresses a postmodern worldview that echoes the worldview of ecofeminism. It is worth seeing Griffin's vision in his own words:

Going beyond the modern world will involve transcending its individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, mechanization, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and militarism. Constructive postmodern thought provides support for the ecology, peace, feminist, and other emancipatory movements of our time, while stressing that the inclusive emancipation must be from modernity itself.<sup>1</sup>

Griffin echoes here the ecofeminist analysis of interlocking systems of domination. In her book, *States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in the Postmodern Age*, Charlene Spretnak uses the term "ecological postmodernism" to refer to Griffin's postmodernism.<sup>2</sup> In this project, I elaborate on the intersection between ecofeminism and postmodern process thought and the ability of these positions to contribute to moral consideration of nonhuman animals.

Ecofeminists have offered their perspective in conversation with, or as a corrective to, various environmental positions. Carolyn Merchant compares ecofeminism with feminist theory in general through the categories of liberal, reform, and radical, locating ecofeminism in the radical category.<sup>3</sup> Karen Warren identifies four categories of western environmental ethics, which she calls house, reformist, mixed

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<sup>1</sup> David Ray Griffin, *Sacred Interconnections* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), x.

<sup>2</sup> Charlene Spretnak, *States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in the Postmodern Age* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Merchant, "Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory," in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein. San Francisco (Sierra Club Books, 1990), 100-101.

reform, and radical.<sup>4</sup> She posits an ecofeminist ethic, however, that critiques the “ethical absolutism and ethical relativism” that emerge from these positions and from those of animal rights theorists and creates an ecofeminist ethics as an alternative.<sup>5</sup>

Deep ecology is a form of radical environmentalism formulated initially by Arne Naess and extended by George Sessions and Bill Duvall. Deep ecology shares ecofeminism’s challenge to the anthropocentrism and dualism dominant in Western thought, holding that this anthropocentrism and this dualism are responsible for the mindset that allows for the degradation of the earth. Deep ecology posits biocentric egalitarianism as a corrective. An emphasis on self-realization in a gender-neutral metaphysical sense can be found in the writing of deep ecologists.<sup>6</sup> This self-realization leads to identification with the human and non-human worlds.

Deep ecologists and animal rights theorists debate about where the focus of analysis and action should be. Deep ecologists have accused animal rights theorists of sentimentalism, and animal rights theorists have accused deep ecologists of ignoring the suffering of individual animals.

Process thought has had a strongly ecological articulation, most notably after the publication of *Is It Too Late?* by John B. Cobb, Jr.<sup>7</sup> This book explicitly named the depth of the ecological crisis in the 1970s. Since that time, process thought has been used to analyze ecological and animal rights issues. Both Cobb and Charles Birch’s work, *The*

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<sup>4</sup> Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 77.

<sup>5</sup> Warren, 88-93.

<sup>6</sup> Marti Keehl. “Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference,” in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), 129.

<sup>7</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr., *Is it Too Late? A Theology of Ecology*, rev. ed. (Denton: Environmental Ethics Books, 1995). Originally published in 1972.

*Liberation of Life*,<sup>8</sup> and Jay McDaniel's *Of God and Pelicans*<sup>9</sup> raise concern for the environment and the suffering of individual animals. In his essay, "Whitehead's Deeply Ecological Worldview," Griffin argues that process thought provides a resolution of the concerns of both deep ecologists and animals rights theorists.<sup>10</sup> Process thought and ecofeminism have also been in dialogue in the work of Carol Christ<sup>11</sup> and Nancy Howell.<sup>12</sup> Whereas many ecofeminists eschew the notion of hierarchies altogether, process thought posits the notion of gradations of value in biological organization; this offers a coherent way to understand one's actual practice in the world. In this project, I argue that the notion of gradations of value is helpful in understanding the relationship of human beings to nonhuman animals and the rest of creation.

This project thus explores the analysis begun by others in the areas of deep ecology and animal rights. I also draw from ecofeminist contextual ethics, Griffin's reconciliation of deep ecology and animal rights, and I will join ecofeminists in their critique of some aspects of deep ecology. I will offer an ecofeminist postmodern process articulation of theory and practice.

Part two of this project looks at embodied ecological education and experiences whereby theory and practice can be integrated. A sample program developed from a process perspective of education is included in Appendix A.

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Liberation of Life* (Denton: Environmental Ethics Books, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Jay B. McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> David Ray Griffin. "Whitehead's Deeply Ecological Worldview," in *Worldviews and Ecology*, ed. M. Tucker and J. Grim (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Carol Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1997); *She Who Changes* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Nancy R. Howell, *A Feminist Cosmology: ecology, solidarity, and metaphysics* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2000).

Buddhist scholar and activist Joanna Macy has done work most effectively weaving theory and practice. Drawing on deep ecology, Buddhism, and living systems theory, Macy has done extensive work helping people connect with themselves as “interexistent with all beings.”<sup>13</sup> She posits that at this moment in human history we are in a time she calls, “The Great Turning,” where we are faced with the choice of turning from an industrial-growth society to a life-sustaining society.<sup>14</sup> Using rituals, meditations, and exercises, Macy has conducted workshops and trainings for over thirty years, giving participants opportunities to experience their interdependence and relational existence and allowing them to feel pain for the world and work through that pain in ways that empower them to act toward a sustainable world.

Carol Christ, Starhawk, and other Goddess scholars have also done extensive work in creating rituals and meditations that heighten our awareness of our interconnectedness with creation. It is from such works that this project will draw to bring this awareness into the issue of animal suffering and to support activists in their work.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Scope and Limitations of the Project***

In this project, I offer analyses to help faith communities and activists understand how the concept of the interdependent web of existence functions in relation to the

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<sup>13</sup> Joanna Macy, “The Ecological Self: Postmodern Ground for Right Action,” in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, ed. Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward), 263.

<sup>14</sup> Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, *Coming Back to Life* (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 1998), 15-16.

<sup>15</sup> Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*; Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), *Dreaming the Dark* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

mistreatment and suffering of individual animals. I also offer the resources of process thought, both theoretical and experiential, to articulate an adequate ethic regarding the human-caused suffering of individual animals.

My review of environmental history and movements is necessarily brief. My analysis of deep ecology, ecofeminism, and process thought is detailed. Since the overall lens of this project is ecofeminist process thought, environmentalism and animal rights or welfare theories are reviewed and evaluated with respect their relationship to ecofeminist process thought.

While there is indirect human-caused suffering of individual animals, such as the suffering of a polar bear as his/her environment is eroded due to global warming (and we can only imagine the pain of starving to death), this project will focus primarily on direct human-caused suffering. My specific focus is on the environmental practices and the treatment of nonhuman animals in the United States.

This project is limited to the intersection of the perspectives of deep ecology, ecofeminism, and process thought. It is also limited to exploring the concept of interdependence in relation to concepts of the self, nonhuman beings, and the rest of nature through ecofeminist process thought. While there are many theories and models of religious education that might be used as resources for transformative experiences and reflections, this project is also limited to exploring religious education from the perspectives of process thought and, in a limited way, deep ecology.

But facts alone don't change behavior. If that were true, then as soon as any of us hear about the cruel and inhumane treatment of factory-farmed animals or animals used for testing cosmetics and cleaning products, we would call for the end of such

treatment. The development of the sensibilities needed to act compassionately on behalf of nonhuman beings cannot be prescribed or willed into being. What touches one individual may leave another unaffected, and there are, no doubt, numerous ways in which these sensibilities are stimulated and emerge. I assert that praxis—an action-reflection-action model of theory and practice, knowledge, and experience—offers the best opportunity for faith communities and environmental activists to apprehend the suffering of animals and then to be sustained in whatever activism emerges.

### ***Procedure for Integration***

This project proceeds in two parts. Using library research, I analyze environmentalist ethical positions in ecofeminism and deep ecology in relation to their moral considerations of individual animals. I also explore resources within process thought that speak on behalf of individual animals. In Part One the first chapters give a detailed exploration of deep ecology, ecofeminism, and process thought. I consider each of these movements separately, then look at points of convergence and divergence among them. Drawing upon the work of Alfred North Whitehead as developed by Charles Birch, John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin, I use the resources of process thought to articulate an adequate position toward nonhuman animals. Finally, I apply ecofeminist critique through an analysis of hunting and the treatment of factory-farmed chickens. Although I offer a critique of deep ecology, I also make appreciative use of it in this part of the project.

Part Two gives a process perspective of religious education and reflections based on a relational, embodied understanding of the world. Appendixes include a sample religious education program, and resources that I found as inspiration in this

work. In creating both this project, I draw on my location as an ecofeminist process thinker and animal rights advocate, as well as my personal work with Joanna Macy. I also draw on my experiences as a Unitarian Universalist minister and board member of Unitarian Universalists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. I further draw on my twenty years of counseling experience and fifteen years as a ritualist in earth-centered spirituality.

### ***Chapter Outlines***

#### **Part One: Learning to Hear Differently**

Chapter 1: *Introduction* This chapter provides an introductory overview of the project, including the problem to be addressed, the importance of the problem, the thesis statement, work previously done in the field, the scope and limitations of the project, the procedure to be used for integration, and the chapter outlines.

Chapter 2: *Can Anyone Hear Them?* This chapter introduces the tension between concern for the interdependent web of existence and a seeming lack of consistent expression of concern for the human-caused suffering of individual animals. This is a tension I find in Unitarian Universalism, a denomination in which the value of caring for the interdependent web of existence is espoused, but in which the suffering of individual animals in the web only inconsistently addressed. This chapter describes a pivotal experience of mine that significantly informs this present work.

Chapter 3 *Environmentalism and Ecological Movements* This chapter gives a brief history of environmentalism, covering reform environmentalism and the

development of deep ecology and ecofeminism, to provide the analysis necessary to understand the foundations of these movements.

**Chapter 4: *Ecological Movements Contrasted*** This chapter contrasts ecofeminism with deep ecology and deep ecology with process thought. It offers detailed examinations of the points of convergence and tensions between deep ecology and constructive postmodern process thought, which prepare for subsequent chapters' detailed exploration of these movements in relation to how they each take into account human-caused suffering of individual animals in factory farming, animal testing, etc.

**Chapter 5: *Ecofeminism, Environmental Ethics, and Nonhuman Animals*** This chapter presents a detailed ecofeminist critique of deep ecology by exploring deep ecology's valorization of hunting, then moves to the inadequacy of deep ecology's moral consideration of factory-farmed animals.

**Chapter 6: *A Whiteheadian View of Peter Singer, Tom Regan, and Land Ethics*** This chapter considers rights positions and land ethics from the perspective of five tenets that make up a superior environmental ethic from the perspective of process thought.

## Part Two: Embodied Ecological Education

**Chapter 7: *Process Religious Education*** This chapter offers a theory of process religious education for transformation and for the development of ecological sensibilities, including concern for individual animals.

**Chapter 8: *The Ecological Self*** This chapter makes appreciative use of Joanna Macy's articulation of the ecological self through "the Work that Reconnects" and



provides resources for those beginning to work on behalf of animals and seasoned activists to find spiritual support and strength for the work.

Chapter 9: *The Implications of Living in Love*. This final chapter offers summary remarks, which include an expanded sermon that calls for compassion and justice in relation to human actions toward nonhuman animals.

**Appendixes:**

A: "From Bambi to Wolves: Nonhuman Life and Animal Rights: An Ethical Exploration through Film and Theology/Philosophy." A sample ecological educational program,

B: Resources – Inspiration for the Journey

## Chapter 2 Can Anyone Hear Them?

*We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all  
existence of which we are a part.*

—Unitarian Universalist Seventh Principle

The forty-fourth General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) opened on Thursday, June 23, 2005, in Fort Worth, Texas, to a roaring crowd of about 4,000. As is the custom at every annual meeting of the UUA, there was up-beat singing and a welcome from a representative of the local Native American community, which is an acknowledgement on the part of the UUA—which proclaims its desire to be an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multicultural institution—of the history of oppression of native peoples. Next came the lighting of the flaming chalice, the symbol of Unitarian Universalism's on-going search for truth and meaning. The flame burned brightly as a man from a local congregation gave the rousing welcome to the city: WELCOME TO FORT WORTH! The crowd roared back with cheers. The man proudly talked about the presence of Unitarian Universalism in Texas—a liberal voice in a bastion of conservatism—and praised the crowd for its enthusiasm, assuring us that we would enjoy Fort Worth despite the triple digit temperatures outside. He extolled the virtues of Fort Worth, "the city where the West begins and cowboy history meets the modern day." We would, he said, find restaurants, shopping, and cultural activities. We were especially encouraged to visit the historic Stockyard Station for shopping and entertainment. Stockyard Station, which the speaker enthusiastically proclaimed, was a famous stockyard known in the past for "cattle dismemberment."

*Cattle dismemberment.*

A shocking phrase. Many in the crowd laughed. Others didn't. I was stunned by the apparent lack of awareness that "cattle dismemberment" might be a concept that some Unitarian Universalists would find not funny, that some of us might find it tragic. I spoke with other attendees afterward; a few were not bothered, but some, including some non-vegetarians, were indeed uncomfortable with the phrase.

Unitarian Universalism is a non-creedal, values-based faith guided in practice by its seven Principles and Purposes, written into its by-laws since 1985. Both Unitarianism and Universalism, which merged in 1961 to become the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, had already been on the front lines of causes for justice, had (always) been a voice for the voiceless. Abolition. Women's rights. Economic justice. Peace. Democracy. Civil liberties. Prison reform. Alternatives to the death penalty. Human rights. One former UUA president, William Schultz, is the Executive Director of Amnesty International USA. Today the UUA is coming to terms with its own complex history related racial justice. We are sincere in our commitment to work toward racial justice and anti-oppression.

Environmental issues have figured prominently in UUA social justice programs. We care deeply about the environment, and in 1995 the General Assembly voted to add the Seventh Principle, "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part," to the Principles and Purposes that we "affirm and promote." An affiliate of the UUA, "the Seventh Principle Project" (which renamed itself the UU Ministry for Earth at the 2005 General Assembly) is a widely popular and well-supported group. Unitarian Universalists care about the environment, sustainability, global warming, endangered species, and the moral consumption of resources, all of which have been the subject of

study and resolutions by the General Assembly. We care about these things. We really do. And we put our values into action in countless ways.

And so I am left with a question.

Given the long history of work for social justice by Unitarians and Universalists, including the work of some in our history for animal welfare and animal rights,<sup>16</sup> given that Unitarian Universalists valorize the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part, how is it that the plight of animals raised for slaughter in deplorable conditions, which “cattle dismemberment” so thoroughly represents, does not figure into our long list of justice issues? How is it that the man’s comment was met with laughter and not scorn or complete silence? How can that be? How can it be that Unitarian Universalists, who have a history of supporting ecological issues, do not speak out in larger numbers about factory-farming, about cruel and unnecessary testing on animals, about the painful and terrifying raising and trapping of animals for the frivolous indulgence of wearing fur, about the maltreatment and use of animals for “entertainment”? We may not all come to the same conclusions, but why are we not having the conversation more widely?

The magnitude of the suffering of individual animals caused by human beings is difficult to comprehend. Affirming our respect for the interdependent web offers us a way to articulate the felt connection that many of us intuit or experience fully. Understanding and responding to human-caused animal suffering often requires analysis and experience in order to transform our discomfort and/or denial into compassionate engagement.

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<sup>16</sup> Henry Bergh, founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was a Unitarian.

I assert that the concept of the interdependent web also functions to silence the voices of individual animals primarily because it is informed, whether consciously or not, by deep ecology, which itself does not adequately take *individual* animals into moral consideration. Deep ecology speaks generally. It speaks for species and groups. The web thus functions to mask the human discomfort and/or denial that accompany the fact of nonhuman animal suffering.

The next chapter will provide a brief history of the environmental movements, along with an initial exploration of deep ecology and ecofeminism.

### Chapter 3: Environmentalism and Ecological Movements

Environmentalism and environmental ethics form the basis for analysis and discourse regarding not only the environment but also species of animals and the consideration, or lack thereof, for individual animals in general and the human-caused suffering of animals. This chapter provides the groundwork for understanding the context out of which deep ecology and ecofeminism emerged. As we consider the concept of the interdependent web, this history helps us understand how the concept has come to inform human self-understanding in relation to the rest of nature. It is through this growing relational self-understanding that the moral consideration of nonhuman animals in general has come about in the ecological movement. Exploring this history allows us to see how these movements contributed to the development of ethics regarding individual animals.

#### ***Environmental History***

As early as the late 1800s, conservation efforts were launched by John Muir and the Sierra Club, but the general population paid little attention except to acknowledge the beauty of nature. Little heed was paid to the warnings raised at that time that the environment was already in jeopardy. In 1962, when Rachel Carson articulated the urgency of the environmental crisis in her book, *Silent Spring*, her focused concern was met by furious attacks from the chemical industry.<sup>17</sup> This criticism resulted, however, in publicity for her book, and President John F. Kennedy set up a special panel of the Science Advisory Committee to study the problem of pesticides. Nevertheless, the issue was not foremost in the minds of the general population. It has only been since the lives of many people in the so-called “first world” have been threatened by the imminent

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<sup>17</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

destruction of the environment through global warming, hazardous waste, and other threats to lifestyle that “ecology” has become a household word.

Various forms of environmentalism have developed over time, each with its own philosophy, worldview, and proposed solutions to the environmental crisis. Feminists have put forth a critique in the ecological debate that challenges the basic assumptions and structure of some of these environmental theories. In the next section, I discuss reform environmentalism, including conservation and wilderness preservation efforts. I then discuss deep ecology and ecofeminist thought.

### ***Reform Environmentalism***

Reform environmentalism comes from the liberal political tradition of rights and obligations and the social contract. Just as liberal feminists sought equality by working within the current structure, reform environmentalists have sought to alter human relations with nature through the passage of laws and regulations.<sup>18</sup> Merchant puts it this way:

For liberal feminists (as for liberalism generally), the environmental problems result from the overly rapid development of natural resources and the failure to regulate environmental pollutants. Better science, conservation and laws are the proper approaches to resolving resource problems.<sup>19</sup>

Reform environmentalism holds an anthropocentric view of nature. The motivation behind environmental efforts is the preservation of human life and the preservation of wildlife and wilderness for human enjoyment and pleasure. Drawing upon the work of environmental philosopher John Rodman, Michael Zimmerman

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<sup>18</sup> Carolyn Merchant, “Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory,” in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. I Diamond and G. Orenstein. (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), 100. (Henceforth referred to as *RW*.)

<sup>19</sup>Merchant, 101.

discusses Rodman's four stages in ecological consciousness, the first three of which fall under reform environmentalism; "the fourth stage, 'ecological sensibilities,' is Rodman's term for deep ecology."<sup>20</sup>

First, resource conservation focuses on the need to conserve resources due to our obligation to future generations. Lorraine Elliot also identifies the "'resource conservation' ethos, where the primary imperative for action is to maintain the economic viability of a species, especially those that have a food or other commodity value for humans."<sup>21</sup> Elliot makes this point further with a quote from the World Conservation Strategy: "conservation in the interests of 'human use of the biosphere and of ecosystems and species that compose it, so that they may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining their potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations.'"<sup>22</sup> In this stage we can see how individual animals can be considered as ends for human needs.

The second stage in ecological consciousness identified by Rodman, as discussed by Zimmerman, is wilderness preservation. This stage reveals an anthropocentric bias based on the notion that preservation is carried out on primarily so that human beings can continue to enjoy it for "the aesthetic or religious experiences" the wilderness provides for human beings.<sup>23</sup>

In the third stage, there is an attempt to demonstrate that nonhuman life is worthy of moral concern and/or legal standing. Certain animals are judged to hold rights and

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Zimmerman "Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism: the Emerging Dialogue," in *RW*, 139.

<sup>21</sup> Lorraine Elliot, *The Global Politics of the Environment*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 28.

<sup>22</sup> Elliot, 29-30 (cited in Miller, 1983, p. 250).

<sup>23</sup> Zimmerman, 139.



are to be protected by laws. In this stage we find the work of humane societies and anti-cruelty laws. Animal rights theorists also operate out of this stage.

In reform environmentalism, reason and the assignment of rational and economic value is employed to address environmental concerns. Elliot describes this approach and its hoped for effects.

One of the major characteristics of the post-Cold War and post-Rio era has been the continued globalisation of a neo-liberal international economic order and the spread (some would claim the triumph) of capitalism (see Little, 1995), engendering what Paterson describes as the 'hegemony of neo-liberal economic assumptions' (1995, p. 216)...for many whose positions can be characterised as reformist or problem-solving, this is to be welcomed. In this view, free(r) trade along with the free movement of capital, supported by limited interference in the market, provides the basis for increased economic welfare, greater equity and, as a welcome consequence, the potential for greater economic protection. Environmental values and costs will be internalized and major economic players will be encouraged, through competition and market-based mechanisms, to act in a more environmentally sustainable and sound manner.<sup>24</sup>

In reform environmentalism we find concerns for individual animals articulated in the context of how the treatment of animals affects economic conditions. We also find here a critique <sup>(of)</sup> factory farming based on the negative effects that this practice has on the environment.

The fourth stage, ecological sensibilities, which Zimmerman indicates is Rodman's term is deep ecology, is treated below.

### ***Deep Ecology***

The concept of deep ecology, which challenges both anthropocentrism and Western dualistic thought and holds that dualistic categories are responsible for the mindset that permits the degradation of the earth, is most strongly associated with Arne

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<sup>24</sup> Elliot, 248.

Naess, who considered all positions that attribute intrinsic value to nonhuman beings to express “deep ecology.” In the U.S., George Sessions and Bill Devall are most widely associated with deep ecology. Mind/body, culture/nature splits, they tell us, have led to humanity becoming estranged from the very earth we depend upon for existence and apart from whom we do not exist. Challenging Cartesian mechanism and dualism, deep ecology sees human beings as interconnected with all beings and living things. “Deep ecology,” Zimmerman writes, “thinks nondualistically, it looks to the rich web of internal relations that constitutes the universe”<sup>25</sup>

While deep ecology recognizes that reform environmentalism working with science has a part to play in preventing the destruction of the earth, it also understands the limitations and inadequacies of that position<sup>26</sup> and proposes that only a radical change in philosophy and worldview will suffice in the long run.

One area of importance in deep ecology is a relational understanding of the self. Deep ecology posits a notion of the self that understands itself in terms of the reality of its interdependence with all life. This “self-in-Self” is understood as overcoming the narrow limits of ego in favor of the deep intuition of oneness. This self-realization leads to identification with both the human and nonhuman worlds. Eastern mystical traditions, which speak to this concept of self, including recognition of the divine within all that is, have informed the spirituality of deep ecology.<sup>27</sup>

Deep ecology holds that there must be a transformation in how the self views its relation to the rest of nature. It is the separateness of the self, the notion of rigid

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<sup>25</sup> Zimmerman, 140.

<sup>26</sup> Zimmerman states, “Science can be an important part of the solution to anthropocentrism, but only if it’s freed from its current enslavement to economic and nationalistic interests” (Zimmerman, 141).

<sup>27</sup> Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985), 67.

autonomy, and the perception of nature as the “other” that have led to the rationale that permits the destruction of the Earth. Deep ecology, then, also seeks to overturn hierarchical categories and replace them with contextual relationships that identify the interconnectedness of the larger biotic community as a whole. This leads to biocentric or biological egalitarianism, a position that does not differentiate value among species.

It is helpful to see the way that deep ecology characterizes its policies and actions. The Deep Ecology Platform outlines the basic principles of deep ecology developed by Devall and Sessions.<sup>28</sup>

1. The well being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy *vital* needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher (materialistic) standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to implement the necessary changes.<sup>29</sup>

Sessions also discusses Naess' description of the types of life styles that followers of deep ecology would engage in such as living simply and cooperatively in community, non-violence, concern for poorer, disadvantaged peoples, “a tendency

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<sup>28</sup> George Sessions in *Worldviews and Ecology*, 212-213.

<sup>29</sup> George Sessions in *Worldviews and Ecology*, 212-213.

toward vegetarianism,” and protecting species and ecosystems. The platform plus the articulation of these life-style tendencies reveals the depth of the cultural and economic analysis evident in deep ecology. Sessions answers the critique that deep ecology’s platform is “too concerned with philosophical fundamentals and individual life styles” to lead to “an effective political position” by pointing to the structure of the platform as inevitably leading to political activism and also to Naess’ explicit statements regarding activism.<sup>30</sup>

Deep ecology proposes a compelling view of interdependence among human beings and the rest of nature. This radical interdependence has come to be widely accepted, and I find it very helpful in developing an “ecological self” that is *capable* of fostering concern for the rest of nature, including individual nonhuman beings. As we will see, the *potential* of deep ecology to mitigate the human caused suffering of nonhuman animals is not met due to its emphasis on biological egalitarianism. Ecofeminism and process thought, by contrast, offer perspectives that enhance and correct deep ecology’s limitations.

### ***Ecofeminism***

Ecofeminism comes out of the feminist analysis of patriarchal structures that exploit and oppress women and lead to the denigration of the earth. It expresses concern for all systems of domination and sees the connection between them and seeks to overcome the domination of women and nature by transforming structures of power.

Charlene Spretnak traces the roots of ecofeminism to three sources. The first is the study of political theory and history of Marxism by radical feminists in the 1960s.

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<sup>30</sup> Sessions, 214.

Radical feminists eventually rejected the notion that domination was based solely on money and class. The second source is the experience of radical/cultural feminists of the Earth-based Goddess religion. This movement has led to the empowerment of women in their association with nature. Although not initially grounded in ecology, it has nevertheless resulted in reverence for the sacredness of nature. The third source of ecofeminism Spretnak identifies is environmentalism. Liberal feminists exposed to environmental studies, groups, and politics found that ecofeminist analysis resonated for them.<sup>31</sup>

The helpfulness of associating women with nature has been debated among feminists. There are those who feel that the continued association with nature and its essentialist claims ties women to their biology and forestalls emancipatory efforts.<sup>32</sup> Another side of the argument asserts that it is the essential difference of women from men that makes women uniquely qualified to address—and capable of addressing—concerns with nature. Some feminists have claimed that this latter view leads to the perpetuation of hierarchical relations. Others fear that the implication in this view is that matriarchy is the answer to patriarchy, although most would deny that this power-reversal is the intended outcome. Certainly, women's connection to nature through childbirth and menstrual cycles that are linked to the cycles of the moon is profound; however, it is important to acknowledge that many men can, and *do*, experience a strong connection with nature and act out of that connection in earth-loving ways. Many ecofeminists, myself included, hold the view that women *and* men are inextricably part of the interdependent web of existence and, therefore, not separate from nature. We

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<sup>31</sup> Charlene Spretnak, "Ecofeminism: Our Roots and Our Flowering," in *RW*, 5-6.

<sup>32</sup> Merchant, 102.

insist that a recognition and reclaiming of that connection *for all of us* is what is desired and necessary.

Concepts of the divine in ecofeminist theology are inclusive and reflect a variety of traditions. Ecofeminists in Judeo-Christian traditions have developed a concept of humanity's relationship to the divine and nature that refutes the notion of a Biblical directive for men to dominate women and, by association, nature. *In Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, Rosemary Radford Ruether articulates a significant critique of Western religious and philosophic thought and presents a detailed and piercing critique of Christianity. While acknowledging the expression of ecofeminist and liberation themes in other traditions, she has remained in her own Christian tradition, one that she mines for expressions of ecological theology. She also cites Matthew Fox, who identifies the "blessed state of nature," Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Alfred North Whitehead, whom she summarizes as representing "important efforts to incorporate new scientific understanding, the new earth story of evolution and the new subatomic physics or quantum mechanics."<sup>33</sup>

Native American women who transmit the wisdom of indigenous cultures also bring an important perspective to ecofeminism. Native American author and scholar Paula Gunn Allen, for example, claims that "traditional tribal life styles are more often gynocentric than not. These features make understanding tribal cultures essential to all responsible activists who seek life-affirming social changes that can result in a real

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<sup>33</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 241-242.

decrease in human and planetary destruction and a real increase in quality of life for all inhabitants of planet earth.”<sup>34</sup>

Goddess spirituality celebrates the Divine Feminine as progenitor of all life; the Goddess is seen as immanent, animating all of nature. Ecofeminists in this tradition express an embodied spirituality and draw from rich images of the Goddess from the past and create contemporary images and rituals.<sup>35</sup> Carol Christ has developed a systematic “thealogy” of Goddess spirituality, which she describes as follows:

...the Goddess is the power of intelligent embodied love that is the ground of all being. The earth is the body of the Goddess. All beings are interdependent in the web of life. Nature is intelligent, alive and aware. As part of nature, human beings are relational, embodied and interdependent. The basis of the ethics is the feeling of deep connection to all people and all beings in the web of life. The symbols and rituals of Goddess religion bring these values to consciousness and help us build communities in which we can create a more just, peaceful, and harmonious world.<sup>36</sup>

Like deep ecology, ecofeminism critiques the Western mechanistic worldview that shifted thought (*and our experience*) of nature from living in the rhythms of the cycles of life to domination and control. Carolyn Merchant writes:

The removal of animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos constituted the death of nature—the most far-reaching effect of the Scientific Revolution. Because nature was now viewed as a system of dead, inert particles moved by external, rather than inherent forces, the mechanical framework itself could legitimate the manipulation of nature. Moreover, as a conceptual framework, the mechanical order had associated with it a framework of values

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<sup>34</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986, 1992), 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ruether argues that notions of widespread matrifocal peaceful egalitarian societies speculated about by Daly, Eisler, Gimbutas, and Christ have been the product more of wishful thinking than fact, particularly on the part of their followers. This is a subject of much debate. Certainly, how we view the past says as much about us as it does about the past. However, Ruether fails to adequately appreciate the transformative power of Goddess spirituality and the contributions made by those scholars. She dismisses their claims too thoroughly.

<sup>36</sup> Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1997), xv.

based on power, fully compatible with the directions taken by commercial capitalism.<sup>37</sup>

Merchant's analysis reveals how deeply and thoroughly embedded this mechanistic worldview is in Western culture.

We have, then, in ecofeminism, a critique of patriarchy and Western philosophic thought. Domination and exploitation of the earth support the threads that weave the fabric of an interlocking system of domination—sexism, racism, classism, all bound up in dualistic categories in which power is exerted in a matrix of oppressions.

Ecofeminism recognizes that alienation from the processes of nature results in alienation from ourselves as we experience ourselves as separate from Nature/Earth/Divine/Spirit. It also recognizes that the denigration of women and of people of color comes out of the denigration of the earth.

As the above discussion indicates, ecofeminism has much in common with deep ecology. But there are also some points of divergence.<sup>38</sup> In the next chapter, I take up some of the divergences as I consider deep ecology in relation to ecofeminism and process thought.

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<sup>37</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1980; reprinted 1990), 193.

<sup>38</sup> Ecofeminism also raises the same critique of reform environmentalism as does deep ecology. Reform environmentalism is anthropocentric and lacks the vision to see that structural cultural transformation is necessary to address environmental issues in a profound and lasting manner.



## Chapter 4: Ecological Movements Contrasted

### *Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology*

The ecofeminist critique of deep ecology maintains that while deep ecology seeks to change anthropocentrism, it fails to recognize the androcentric nature of its presuppositions. Because deep ecology has been developed mainly by men, they seem to naturally bring to it the androcentrism of patriarchy. For example, some ecofeminists are concerned with deep ecology's position on population control, noting that this can be viewed as a function of the patriarchal preoccupation with reproductive control.<sup>39</sup> While ecofeminists comprehend the seriousness of overpopulation, they understand the issue contextually and insist that women be the determiners of their reproductive choices. I find the critique of the androcentric underpinnings of deep ecology more persuasive when it is directed toward deep ecologists who identify with "wild" nature versus "tamed" nature. This identification has led to the valorization of hunting and a disregard for domesticated farm animals. In chapter five I present an ecofeminist critique of hunting and deep ecology's removal of individual animals from moral consideration.

Reflecting feminist concerns with particularity, ecofeminism also takes issue with deep ecology's conception of the expanded self and notions of self-realization. Keehl warns that by "alternately raising the ecosystem or an aggrandized self to the level of supreme value, they have created a holism that risks obliterating the uniqueness and importance of individual beings."<sup>40</sup>

We will see later that ecofeminism is in a position to counter the neglect of individual animals found in deep ecology's biospheric egalitarianism. Further, the

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<sup>39</sup> Zimmerman, 146.

<sup>40</sup> Keehl, *Reweaving the World*, 136.

argument runs that it is possible to practice an ethic of care with nonhuman beings only if the ethic of care and the morality which informs it is first developed through the ability to care for the human community. In seeking to avoid the pitfalls of anthropocentrism, deep ecology has been charged with failing to understand that it is human consciousness that is brought to bear on moral concerns.

The notion of hierarchy has been of concern for deep ecology and ecofeminism. Ecofeminism, rightly, I think, recognizes that we make choices of value in the way we live our daily lives. Ecofeminism has generally tended to eschew the notion of hierarchy, but I take a more nuanced position on this issue, which I will address in more detail later. For now, suffice it to say that as we humans go about our daily lives, our intuition is that there *are* gradations of value with regard to other beings and life forms—whether or not we are vegetarians, what food we buy and where we buy it, even whether or not we allow insects and spiders to live in our houses with us. The notion of biocentric (or biological) egalitarianism, when it is understood as applying to individual beings, is an abstraction that we cannot live out, and ecofeminists who eschew any notion of gradations of value run into the same problem.

Despite the areas of dispute noted above, however, important areas of agreement exist. Both deep ecology and ecofeminism challenge anthropocentrism and the dualisms of the mechanistic worldview. Both are concerned, but I think ecofeminism more overtly so, with interlocking systems of domination. Both articulate a deep reverence for the earth and recognize that we are all a part of the interdependent web of existence. The ecofeminist/deep ecology dialogue is critical when we address ecological concerns, and the areas of agreement are such that a coalition between

these two groups is possible and desirable. Both deep ecology and ecofeminism can help in the development of ecological sensibilities that can be brought to bear on activities to act on behalf of life and can lead toward concerns for individual animals. But they can both also benefit from process thought. It is to process thought and deep ecology that I now turn.

### ***Deep Ecology and Process Thought***

As we have seen, deep ecology proposes biological or biocentric egalitarianism, which ascribes equal value to ecosystems and individuals within ecosystems. We are beginning to see how this position fails to take into account the particularity of individuals. In this section, I consider how process thought provides a position that validates both the individuals in the ecosystem and the ecosystem itself.

David Ray Griffin proposes that Whiteheadian process thought is deeply ecological and brings individual nonhuman animals into moral consideration. He reconciles deep ecology's concept of intrinsic or inherent value, as developed by Arne Naess, with Whiteheadian concepts of internal relations and intrinsic value to show how Whitehead's philosophy is truly deeply ecological *and* includes concern for individual animals.

In his article, "Whitehead's Deeply Ecological Worldview," Griffin identifies three ways that the term "deep ecology" has been employed. The first usage Griffin labels *deep ecology<sub>na</sub>*, meaning "nonanthropocentric." In this position, there is acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of other species and a focus on the rights of individual animals, particularly higher animals. Speaking of adherents of this position, Griffin writes that "most of them draw a line beneath which there is no assumed to be

no reason for ethical concern.”<sup>41</sup> While the preservation and conservation efforts of these environmentalists are like those of the reform type discussed earlier, on those grounds most deep ecologists would challenge some of their assumptions. The second category of deep ecology that Griffin identifies is *deep ecology<sub>b</sub>*, or “biospheric deep ecology,” referring to deep ecologists who hold a concern for the entire biosphere and draw no lines below which inherent value ceases.<sup>42</sup> The third category is *deep ecology<sub>e</sub>*, meaning “egalitarian deep ecology.” Griffin identifies this group as asserting biocentric or biological egalitarianism.<sup>43</sup>

Griffin contends that Whitehead’s ecological worldview includes *deep ecology<sub>na</sub>* and *deep ecology<sub>b</sub>* but rejects *deep ecology<sub>e</sub>* as it has been understood. Whitehead’s position acknowledges the need to focus on the biosphere, but eschews dualistic line drawing or exclusive focus on animals by virtue of their place in the ecosystem. At the same time, this position acknowledges that higher animals “are worthy of special concern.”<sup>44</sup> Griffin explains Whitehead’s position as holding that:

[s]ome types of beings have more capacity to realize intrinsic value than others, [that] this greater capacity includes both a greater range of potentialities that can be realized and a greater capacity for suffering, and [that] it is ethically appropriate, accordingly, to be especially concerned about not needlessly causing suffering in such beings or preventing the realization of their desires.<sup>45</sup>

Griffin unpacks the meanings of inherent value and intrinsic value for Naessians and Whiteheadians, noting that Naessians use inherent and intrinsic interchangeably, and we will see Whiteheadians making distinctions between these two types of value.

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<sup>41</sup> David Ray Griffin. “Whitehead’s Deeply Ecological Worldview,” in *Worldviews and Ecology*, ed. M. Tucker and J. Grim. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994). 191.

<sup>42</sup> Griffin, “Whitehead’s Deeply Ecological Worldview,” 191.

<sup>43</sup> Griffin, 191.

<sup>44</sup> Griffin, 191.

<sup>45</sup> Griffin, 191-192.

*The Divine Cry of Our Time*, an unpublished manuscript dedicated to the proposal of a process theology for global democracy, articulates a beautiful ethic applicable to ecological and animal issues, for surely the “divine cry” calls to us to hear the cries and voices of those whose voices are not like our own. Griffin explains how “panexperientialism” offers a way to reconcile Whitehead with deep ecology to show that all individuals have intrinsic value.<sup>46</sup>

The following brief discussion of Whitehead’s philosophy, which includes panexperientialism—the notion that all of reality is constituted by occasions of experience rather than by inert bits of matter—is essential to our understanding of process thought in general and the efficacy of process thought as it takes into account both the biosphere and individual animals in particular. The discussion also sets the stage for us to grasp the importance of process thought in accounting for gradations of value, a notion that ecofeminism finds problematic, but one that is essential in contextualizing the choices that we make in our daily lives.

Developing his philosophy in the context of advancements in quantum physics and relativity theory, Whitehead called his speculative philosophy the “philosophy of organism,” the goal of which is to “frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted.”<sup>47</sup> In “A Synopsis of Process Thought,” Sheela Pawar provides a concise description of Whitehead’s philosophy:

Whitehead departed from traditional philosophy by conceiving of individual entities as series of moments of experience instead of masses of within each moment, an entity is influenced by others, creates its own

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<sup>46</sup> Also see Griffin’s discussion in “Whitehead’s Deeply Ecological Worldview.”

<sup>47</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (1929), corrected edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), xi.

identity and propels itself into further experiences. Because of the involvement of all moments of experience with each other, Whitehead conceived of the entire cosmos as an organic whole. Just as the cells in our bodies are interrelated, all elements of the universe – from the light waves of a distant star to a human being living in Boise, Idaho—all are interrelated.<sup>48</sup>

We can see from this description that Whitehead countered Cartesian dualistic and mechanistic constructions of the world. These moments of experience are described by Whitehead:

‘Actual entities—also termed actual occasions’—are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. They differ among themselves: God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. But, though there are gradations of importance, and diversities of function, yet in the principles which actuality exemplifies all are on the same level. The final facts are alike, actual entities: and these actual entities are drops of experience, complex and interdependent.<sup>49</sup>

Whitehead’s organic worldview supports ecofeminist and deep ecology’s understanding of the relational nature of all reality.

“Panexperientialism,” the term Griffin developed to describe the Whiteheadian notion that experience characterizes the nature of all reality,<sup>50</sup> offers a way to reconcile Whitehead with deep ecology to show that all individuals have intrinsic value. Panexperientialism attributes intrinsic value to all individuals and recognizes the interrelatedness of all things. Intrinsic value, defined as “value for itself,” is found in only those things that have experience, and “only experiences have value for themselves.”<sup>51</sup> Griffin goes on to discuss Whitehead’s conception of compound individuals, such as “human beings, other animals, and living cells,” which have an overall unity of

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<sup>48</sup> Sheela Pawar, “A Synopsis of Process Thought,” <http://www.ctr4process.org/about/process/Synopsis.shtml>.

<sup>49</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Griffin, “Whitehead’s Deeply Ecological Worldview,” 195.

<sup>51</sup> Griffin, *The Divine Cry of Our Time* (Manuscript, 2000), 23.

experience, versus aggregational societies, such as “sticks, stones and mountains,” which do not.<sup>52</sup> Only genuine individuals are said to have intrinsic value.

Griffin points out that Whitehead also describes enduring individuals as the “enduring life of the cell, the human mind or soul or the animal mind or soul.”<sup>53</sup> In this scheme only one occasion of experience, or actual occasion, exists at a time and relates to other actual occasions in the context of the past or future. Each occasion of experience is first a subject prehending—receiving and integrating data—including past occasions. It then “perishes” and becomes an object to be prehended by the next subject. Having taken into itself influences from previous entities, each occasion is internally related to, or constituted in part by, the previous entity and to all other occasions in its relevant past.

Griffin points out the importance that a notion of temporally ordered societies has on our conceptions of interrelatedness. This interrelatedness, he says, counters the Cartesian view of substance as “that which requires nothing but itself to exist,” which implies a relationship with others based upon difference, whereas the panexperientialist view speaks to the interrelatedness of us all—one to the other. This includes humans and nonhumans.

In the third type of individual, the *compound individual*, the organization of cells results in a dominant member, such as the soul of a human being or an animal, that emerges and provides the overall unity of experience. Such societies are contrasted with those in which no such dominant member emerges. Griffin uses plants as an example. “[T]he word ‘plant,’ pointing to the fact an organism so named stays put,

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<sup>52</sup> Griffin, *Divine Cry*, 23.

<sup>53</sup> Griffin, *Divine Cry*, 23.

suggests there is no basis for positing a soul. The highest-level individuals would be the plant's various cells. In animals, however, the intrinsic value of the various cells is trivial compared with the intrinsic value of the animal as a whole."<sup>54</sup> What is important for our discussion here is that all individuals have intrinsic value and that there are degrees of intrinsic value.<sup>55</sup>

Griffin points out that there exists a hierarchy of intrinsic value that speaks of a hierarchy of freedom through which there come greater or lesser degrees of spontaneity or self-determination. This explains the intuition that we have, while still affirming nonhuman animal sentience and worth, about the differences between humans and other animals without having to resort to dualism.<sup>56</sup>

Griffin also engages in a helpful discussion of the controversy surrounding the idea of "hierarchy." As can be seen in the debates in ecofeminism and deep ecology, this is an issue of concern. While Griffin acknowledges the association of the word with systems of social domination, he also reminds us that hierarchies in nature exist, though he offers the terms "benign" hierarchies and "multi-leveled."<sup>57</sup> In his discussion, Griffin calls us to a reasonable and thoughtful understanding of our positions. In our everyday lives we make distinctions between various animals based on what we understand as their capacity to feel pain and reflect on their own pain. While we may choose to eradicate the ants that overrun our cupboards (and I suggest if we do this, we can do so in a manner that acknowledges that we are taking life), we reflect on this differently than

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<sup>54</sup> Griffin, *Divine Cry*, 25. One of the charges leveled at animal activists is that we are taking into account animal suffering at the neglect of plant "suffering." The claims that plants feel in ways analogous to humans and nonhuman animals can be seen to be erroneous given this scheme.

<sup>55</sup> Griffin, *Divine Cry*, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Griffin, *Divine Cry*, 26.

<sup>57</sup> Griffin, *Divine Cry*, 27.



we would, say, on a feral cat colony. We might wipe the ants up with paper towels, smashing them. But most of us would be horrified at the thought bludgeoning the feral cats or the opossums in our neighborhood to death.

The interrelatedness of things is seen in the panexperientialist idea of downward causation, which occurs “from the mind to the brain cells and all the other individuals within the body.”<sup>58</sup> This leads us to understand ourselves as “ecological” selves:

The ecological self, rather than drawing a boundary between the ‘I’ and ‘not-I’ at the surface of its body, draws no such boundary whatsoever, seeing all things as entering into itself and itself as entering into all things, thereby regarding the whole world as, in effect, its body. To the extent that we become ecological selves, we would not regard efforts to help others and to sustain the planet merely as ethical duties.<sup>59</sup>

This understanding of the self echoes the understanding held by deep ecologists. Here we also have an understanding of the self-in-relation-to-the-world that feminists concerned about a “loss of self” can embrace. Particularity is not sacrificed; rather, it is particularity noticing its connectedness.

With this background established, I now turn to Griffin’s reconciliation of Whiteheadian notions of intrinsic value and the Naessian understanding of intrinsic and inherent value, which will demonstrate how process thought can affirm both the ecosystem and individual animals.

For Whiteheadians, intrinsic value is value that an individual has in and for itself. Extrinsic value is any other value, or value for others, and includes instrumental value, companion value, aesthetic value, medicinal value, symbolic value, and ecological value. For Naessians, the term “inherent value” refers to the value that something has apart from its value to human beings, but not its *value for itself*. “Inherent value” also

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<sup>58</sup> Griffin, *Divine Cry*, 29.

<sup>59</sup> Griffin, *Divine Cry*, 29.

differs from Whiteheadian intrinsic value in applying to species, not individuals. For Naessians, “inherent value” refers to ecological value, which in Whiteheadian terms can be understood as a type of extrinsic value. Griffin summarizes Naessian inherent value, then, as *“all the value nature has in itself apart from these perceived values to human beings.”*<sup>60</sup>

Griffin next brings together the Whiteheadian “hierarchy of intrinsic value” with the Naessian “egalitarianism of inherent value” as an “egalitarianism of value” he calls “total value,” which he describes as follows:

The total value of something is its intrinsic value plus all of its various types of extrinsic value, especially its ecological value (which is the kind of value Naessians primarily have in mind in speaking of inherent value). The egalitarianism of total value results from the fact that, in general, the intrinsic and ecological value of things stand in inverse relationship to each other: The more intrinsic value, the less ecological value, and vice-versa.<sup>61</sup>

The biosphere needs the lower forms of life to survive. Higher forms of life, especially mammalian life, often detract from the ecological value. Griffin points to this as an important way to reconcile competing ethical perspectives and programs. Humanitarian programs have focused on human life, and of course this is important. Yet the humane movements, which focus on animal rights and issues of anti-cruelty, animal testing, and the humane treatment of farm animals, rightly understand that these animals, usually mammals, also need to be included for moral consideration. Deep ecologists, by contrast, have developed movements to save the essentials, which usually involves whole species whose individual members have little intrinsic value, such as plankton, a life form critical to life itself. What this Whiteheadian “deeply

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<sup>60</sup> Griffin, *Divine Cry*, 31.

<sup>61</sup> Griffin, *Divine Cry*, 32.

ecological worldview” does is offer a way for all of these efforts to be given expression because all of these efforts are needed. Whether we work for human rights or to save the rain forest or dedicate ourselves to ending animal testing, all acts of compassion are valid and essential.

Griffin shows how the terminology of deep ecology and process theology are ostensibly at odds. By explicating Whitehead’s doctrine of intrinsic value and deep ecology’s understanding of intrinsic and inherent value, Griffin shows that these movements can be reconciled, an enterprise that is helpful for those for whom the concept of the interdependent web has meant only ecosystems and whole species of animals. A Whiteheadian position takes individual animals into account by affirming the subjectivity of animal experience, as well as their intrinsic value, and demonstrates that intrinsic value need not negate Naessian inherent value; in fact, the Whiteheadian position affirms both.

In my earlier discussions of deep ecology and process theology, I mentioned some areas of overlap with ecofeminism; the next section will advance a fuller discussion of ecofeminism and process theology as I consider how these positions enhance our understanding of the interdependent web and the place of individual animals in it.

### ***Ecofeminism and Constructive Postmodern Process Thought***

Having shown that process thought articulates a deeply ecological perspective, especially one that corrects or mitigates the concerns that biological egalitarianism

presents, I now turn to a discussion of ecofeminism and postmodern process theology<sup>62</sup> with an emphasis on how they are complementary and how that fact will begin to point us to a satisfactory environmental ethic that includes consideration of individual nonhuman animals and the human-caused suffering they undergo.

As noted previously, *worldview* is of great significance to ecofeminism and process thought; both critique modernity's patriarchal and anthropocentric assumptions in science, politics, culture, and nature, along with the atomistic dualism of the Cartesian worldview. Griffin considers a postmodern worldview that echoes that of ecofeminism; this worldview, he writes, "involves a new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and religious intuitions."<sup>63</sup>

Both ecofeminism and process thought recognize the interconnectedness of all things. I am reminded of a poster I saw years ago with the tree of life in the middle. Flowing in a circle around the tree were the words, "Feminist Ecology—Everything Is Connected." The interconnected web of existence thus informs ecofeminism's understanding of relationships between humans, nonhumans, and all of creation. The human connection with nature is expressed by Carol Christ in *Rebirth of the Goddess* at the opening of a chapter titled "Humanity in the Web of Life," where she quotes a poem by Susan Griffin: "And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature."<sup>64</sup> This restates a deeply held intuition of ecofeminists. As we saw in the previous chapter, the concept of internal relations in process thought tells us "relations are internal to, and

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<sup>62</sup> By "postmodern process theology," I mean constructive type articulated by Griffin. For convenience I will now use "process theology," or "postmodern thought," but the reader should keep in mind that it is to this specific type of process thought that I refer.

<sup>63</sup> Griffin, *Sacred Interconnections*, x.

<sup>64</sup> Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 135.

thus constitutive of, the meanings in question.”<sup>65</sup> Griffin also describes the “human self” as “a natural part of the created world.”<sup>66</sup> Also as mentioned earlier, Spretnak uses the term “ecological postmodernism” to refer to Griffin’s postmodernism.<sup>67</sup>

Interdependence and interconnectedness are expressed in various ways that add to our understanding of this relational worldview. Process theologian Marjorie Suchocki, for example, expresses a powerful sense of interconnectedness when she describes her relationship with her mother. She points out that “the first and foremost insight of process thought is that to exist is to be in relation, and that relationships are internal, not external to existence. [B]ecause of this all existence is interdependent.”<sup>68</sup> Like ecofeminist theology (and all feminist theology), process thought is grounded in experience. The relationality of experience, or “internality of relations,” is expressed in Suchocki’s experiences of loving her mother. Suchocki speaks of the feelings of love for her mother after her mother’s death. She clearly and poignantly describes the complexity involved in loving as a part of herself. The loving is not separate and has continuity and informs other relations, including the relationship with the self in general.<sup>69</sup> As I see it, the implications of this loving, and of other relations of internality, shout for justice and care in relationships with other animals. Many of us can recall the intense love that we feel toward beings that are other than human. We have experiences of deep love and connection with other species, often our companion animals who we share our lives with. When they die we continue to feel the love that we

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<sup>65</sup> Griffin, “Whitehead’s Deeply Ecological Worldview,” 196.

<sup>66</sup> Griffin, *God & Religion in the Postmodern World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 23.

<sup>67</sup> Spretnak, *States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in the Postmodern Age* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 19.

<sup>68</sup> Marjorie Suchocki, “Weaving the World,” in *Process Studies*, Vol. 14, no. 2 (summer 1985), 79.

<sup>69</sup> Suchocki, 78-80.

had for them as Suchocki feels toward her mother. We can feel sympathy with and pain for other animals and they seem to feel sympathy with us. Suchocki suggests “relational existence is mediated by feelings, which give rise, within the supporting context of the body, to thought.”<sup>70</sup> She recognizes the embodied nature of experience, including spiritual experience, which for many of us *is* the feeling (and fact) our interconnectedness.

As Suchocki’s comments reveal, the experience of embodied spirituality, *immanence*, is the result of feeling through the body. Ecofeminist expression of Goddess spirituality speaks of the concept of immanence, a theological notion that divinity is found within and, for me, through our connectedness. Christ offers helpful insights into the concepts of immanence and transcendence in Goddess spirituality and process theology. She identifies feminist theologians’ rejection of the notion of a transcendent god in favor of the concept of immanence and recognizes the dualistic nature of the hierarchical categories of “immanence-transcendence and theism-pantheism.” Yet her experience of the Goddess is one of immanence *and* “personal presence.” She looks to process theology as “a way out of the impasse.”<sup>71</sup> Christ writes:

Process theology’s notion of pan-*en*-theism (all is *in* God) provides a way of understanding God that moves beyond the polarities of immanence and transcendence, pan-theism (all is God) and theism (God is above or beyond all).<sup>72</sup>

She goes on to cite the similarities between the Gaia hypothesis that sees the earth as a “unified, self-regulating organism” and process theology’s view of God as affected by experiences in the world. Christ’s conception of the Goddess and process theology’s

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<sup>70</sup> Suchocki, 82.

<sup>71</sup> Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 104.

<sup>72</sup> Christ, 104.

God are quite compatible. They both express immanence and transcendence, the importance of the body, and the ecological sensibilities that I appreciate in deep ecology. Added to these sensibilities is the process notion of internal relations, or feeling with, all other beings. Surely this feeling with extends to nonhuman animals, and this extension leads to an enlargement of our own interests to include others. All others. The biosphere and the individuals—human and other—who inhabit it.

Interdependence brings with it joyful responsibility.

I have discussed some of the areas in which ecofeminism and postmodern process thought are compatible and complementary. Before I turn to the ethic implied by these philosophies, however, I must point out one concern. While ecofeminism and postmodern process thought have much in common, as we have seen, ecofeminist spirituality spans various faith commitments and traditions. To be accessible to a wider group of people who desire a spirituality that affirms their concern for nonhuman animals, I believe we can be more intentional in our use of the word “God.” Griffin and other process thinkers frequently characterize “God” as the “soul of the universe” or “the Holy Power.” This is an important way to counter the patriarchal notion of the divine. For many spiritual progressives, such as Unitarian Universalists and other activists, widening the images of the divine offers a way for process theology to be more accessible and more deeply ground theological claims for moral consideration of individual nonhuman animals.

## **Chapter 5: Ecofeminism, Environmental Ethics, and Nonhuman Animals**

As we have seen, the notion of the interdependent web can be understood as almost identical to the sentiments expressed by deep ecology. To understand how individual animals came to be invisible in the interdependent web, I now explore deep ecology from the viewpoint of two ecofeminist critiques, both of which affirm the importance of apprehending our interdependence within the web of life while at the same time share concern for the human caused suffering of individual animals. As mentioned above, ecofeminism and environmental ethics have been in dialogue for many years. Both hold a view of life as enmeshed in a web of relationality. Both contend that radical measures should be taken to create ecological stability and restore human beings to a place of balance within the rest of the natural world. Of concern for us here, however, are the ways in which ecofeminism and environmental ethics diverge and which of these two points of view better promotes caring for individual animals in the web of life. In this section I consider two essays critical of deep ecology in relation to its ethical consideration of individual animals.

### ***What of Hunting, You May Ask***

Marti Keehl's critique of hunting, "Licensed to Kill: An Ecofeminist Critique of Hunter's Discourse," helps us to understand the relationship of environmental ethics and deep ecology to efforts advanced on behalf of individual animals. Keehl discusses the practice of hunting and identifies three types of hunters: (1) the happy hunter, who hunts for "recreation and sheer pleasure," (2) the holist hunter who hunts "for the sake of the environment or the biotic whole," and (3) the holy hunter who hunts for the



purpose of “spiritual communion.”<sup>73</sup> While she clarifies that there may be overlaps, she discusses these types of hunters as each having led to the next type as hunters responded to ecological developments, in general, and views of hunting in particular.

Keehl also distinguishes these three hunters from three other types—the hired hunter, the hungry hunter, and the hostile hunter—who, she contends, have not been incorporated into environmental ethical considerations as have the first three types. She critiques happy, holistic, and holy hunting discourses, along with the environmental ethics and philosophy that underpin them, from an ecofeminist perspective that asserts that taking other animals’ lives by the practice of hunting is problematic and unnecessary.<sup>74</sup> Although my project is not concerned primarily with hunting, it is concerned with the ethical treatment of individual animals. Keehl’s discussion of individual animals in regard to environmental ethics, which is based on understanding the history of the impact of hunting on the environmental movement and views of the place of individual animals in the movement’s moral consideration of human caused suffering of individual animals, uncovers problematic presuppositions and characterizations of individual animals that pervade deep ecology.

Keehl first looks at the happy hunter, the one who hunts for the sheer pleasure of the hunt:

In the United States, the conception of hunting as a pleasurable, recreational activity emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century in response to increased urbanization and leisure time (Williams 24-25). This new ‘ethical’ conception of hunting stood in stark contrast to an earlier attitude, which viewed hunting as a means of procuring meat and saw those who hunted for pleasure as worthy of scorn.

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<sup>73</sup> Marti Keehl, “Licensed to Kill: An Ecofeminist Critique of Hunter’s Discourse,” in *Animals and Women*, eds., Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 87.

<sup>74</sup> Keehl, 87.

The stigma attached to deriving pleasure from violence has a long religious history. The Puritans of New England viewed blood sports as frivolous activities on par with gambling and other forms of 'irresponsible pastimes.' ... The new ethical discourse was developed expressly to outline the parameters within which hunting for pleasure could be viewed as an *ethical*, even praiseworthy activity. It was from the marriage of hunting to ethical discourse that the environmental movement was born."<sup>75</sup>

In response to the influence of commercial hunting and fishing, hunters sought the preservation of wilderness so that the practice of hunting for pleasure could continue.<sup>76</sup> Because the hunter was required to exercise personal restraint and self-control, hunting was seen as instructive and as character building. Discussing the major role of Aldo Leopold (himself a "happy hunter") in the development of environmental ethics, Keehl refers to him as "the consummate bridge between the...happy and holist hunters."<sup>77</sup> Leopold's land ethic was "the first philosophical attempt to ground an environmental ethic upon awareness of ecological principles...[and] represents one of the earliest formulations of the holist philosophy that has come to characterize the 'holist hunter.'"<sup>78</sup> She adds that hunters today tend to be more holistic and do not valorize the hunt and the kill. Instead, they emphasize

the many benefits to be gained from the hunt—a sense of camaraderie with other hunters, the pleasure of being immersed in the natural world, and even the meat that is thereby procured. But an increasingly common explanation given by modern-day hunters is the argument that they render a service in 'culling' the 'excess' animals that would otherwise starve. The holist hunter claims to hunt not for the sake of pleasure, but rather for the well being of the biotic community or whole.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Keehl, 93.

<sup>76</sup> Keehl, 93.

<sup>77</sup> Keehl, 95.

<sup>78</sup> Keehl, 95-96.

<sup>79</sup> Keehl, 95.

The philosophical and ethical mandate to hunt is defended by J. Baird Callicott, who faults animal liberationists for negating the biological necessity of killing. Keehl also cites Holmes Rolston's contention that "animal rights proponents lack biological and moral maturity." In this view, she says, hunters understand themselves as merely participating in the "violence of the natural world."<sup>80</sup>

The holy hunter, whom Keehl treats in depth, reflects the notion that hunting can be a religious experience of awe and reverence that brings the hunter into direct communion with nature and the animals being hunted.<sup>81</sup> As previously explained, deep ecology proposes that there must be a transformation in how the self views its relation to nature. It is the separateness of the self, the notion of rigid autonomy, and the perception of nature as the "other" that have led to the destruction of the earth's ecological systems. This is a point with which ecofeminists agree. Deep ecology seeks to promote contextual relationships that identify the interconnectedness of the larger biotic community as a whole. As was discussed in chapter four this has led some to claim biocentric or biological egalitarianism. We have seen in the discussion of deep ecology that this is a compelling and transforming, but this view does not differentiate value among species, which makes it inadequate to account for human caused suffering of individual animals.

According to deep ecology, attaining the "mature" expanded self is the goal of engaging in various activities in the outdoors. "Thus, along with sunbathing, bicycling, skiing, and meditation, Bill Devall and George Sessions, cite hunting as one of the

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<sup>80</sup> Keehl, 98.

<sup>81</sup> Keehl, 99-100.

activities that help to promote a mature sense of Self.”<sup>82</sup> If other activities promote this expanded self, it stands to reason that hunting is not necessary to the formation of a mature self that understands and apprehends its interdependence.

Ecofeminists, in general, myself included, agree with deep ecology that recognizing our interdependence is crucial in developing ecologically ethical sensibilities. I agree with Keehl who takes issue with the notion of the holy hunter that maintains hunting and killing animals as a path to the experiencing interdependence. I will provide a more detailed discussion of the ecological self later to affirm that this sense of self is a helpful, but not sufficient, condition for inspiring actions on behalf of nonhuman beings.

Keehl notes that the holy hunter and deep ecologists often selectively draw on Native American and other tribal narratives and practices as a model for their actions in that natural world, including hunting, wherein the animal “sacrifices” itself for the hunter. She cites Gary Snyder, a deep ecologist whose sentiments reflect the tribal notion that “the animal participates in this exchange on a willing basis out of ‘compassion’ for the hunter.” Keehl points out, however, that hunting is the primary focus of the ethical discussion while other aspects of Native American and other tribal peoples’ lives are neglected. “Although native cultures engage in myriad other practices (e.g., gathering, planting, cooking, weaving, singing, dancing),” she writes, “no other activity is seen to have the same moral relevance.”<sup>83</sup>

Reflecting the ecofeminist concern that deep ecology’s notion of the self is an abstraction, Keehl writes:

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<sup>82</sup> Keehl, 101.

<sup>83</sup> Keehl, 101.

Ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood (1991,1993) has criticized deep ecologists for advocating an expanded sense of identification that is too large and abstract to accommodate the more contextual ties of kinship connection as well as the relevant differences among living beings... The holy hunter's identification is 'so abstract as to be meaningless.'<sup>84</sup>

The hunters emphasize their interconnection as part of their sense of oneness and the attentiveness that they bring to the experience of hunting. They are immersed in the experience and alert to their surroundings and the animals in their sights. Keehl writes:

Although all three categories of hunters emphasize the keen sense of alertness and attention that characterizes the state of mind of the hunter, it is clear that the hunter is not alert enough to notice the state of the animal he is about to kill....If holy hunters were truly were truly attending to nature, it would not be possible to rationalize the death of an animal as freely "given" out of "compassion" for the hunter. They would see in the hunted animal's eyes not "compassion" for the hunter, but rather terror and fright. They would see, in short, that nonhuman animals value their lives no less than do the holy hunters themselves.<sup>85</sup>

Keehl grounds her discussion in ecofeminism and points to what she calls "the hunt for masculine self-identity" as underlying the hunters' experiences and practices. Keehl's analysis reflects the ecofeminist critique of deep ecology's androcentrism.

Keehl's analysis is enormously insightful and points us to an ethic of care in relating to other animals by highlighting the experience of the animal being hunted and killed. Every animal is a being with its own purposes and the desire to live. All animals have hearts that beat and emotions that they feel. They are bodies, just as are we. A certain amount of rationalizing and abstraction is necessary in order to kill for sport.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Keehl, 108.

<sup>85</sup> Keehl, 108-109.

<sup>86</sup> I think it's important to note that my critique of hunting extends to hunting for sport in Western culture, where alternatives to eating animal flesh is available. I hold a contextual ecofeminist ethic in which it is inappropriate to deem as morally wrong a practice of indigenous cultures where animals are the only source of food.

The experience of hunted animals is obscured in the hunting discourse. In this interdependent web that the hunters revel in, the voices of the hunted are heard only as a call to death. They need us to be their voice.

A woman that I am close to (I'll call her J.) told me of her experience of hunting with her father. As a girl of seven or eight, she was required to go hunting with her father several times. She dimly recalls the first few occasions as merely unpleasant, but she vividly remembers the last hunt. On that occasion J. reluctantly went along and was told to keep quiet while the adult men hunted rabbits. The group was successful in killing several rabbits, which they put in a cloth sack. J. was too young to carry anything very heavy, so she was given the sack to carry on her back. As she related this incident that had happened decades ago, her eyes grew wet. I could tell that she still remembered the feeling of the warm bodies of the rabbits lying against her small back as she trudged home. I sensed her hurt and her horror. The incident was still fresh in her memory. At dinner after that hunting expedition, she had sat at the table, refusing to eat, sorrowful and silently staring at the bodies of the rabbits whose warm bodies she could still feel pressing against her back. Finally, she blurted out, "Don't eat it! It's Thumper!" Her mother was dismayed, her father was perturbed, and she was sent to her room. J. never had to go hunting again. And she has not eaten the flesh of animal since.

### ***And Chickens...***

I now turn to ecofeminist Karen Davis, who critiques environmental ethics in general, and deep ecology in particular, for their failure to take into moral consideration the lives of individual animals in ecosystems and species, particularly farm animals.

Davis is interested in understanding how the philosophy of deep ecology and the philosophy of animal rights fit together. The title of her essay, "Thinking Like a Chicken: Farm Animals and the Feminine Connection," which contains within it another of Davis's essays, refers to Aldo Leopold's admonition to "think like a mountain."<sup>87</sup> Leopold advocated a land ethic as the means to develop sensibilities that would invoke in human beings the desire and ability to "think ecologically." Davis charges that Leopold's statement

has been taken by some environmentalists as a mandate to exclude from substantive and ethical consideration the individual existences that help constitute the mountain, particularly those classified in Leopold's terms as 'unnatural, tame, and confined' in contrast to those regarded as 'natural, wild, and free.' The ontological result is a holism devoid of contents, resembling an empty shell. The ethical result is moral abandonment of beings whose sufferings and other experiences are inconsequential compared to the 'big realm.'<sup>88</sup>

It should be noted that some ecofeminists, Karen J. Warren and myself included, value Aldo Leopold's land ethic for its articulation of and contribution to understanding important ways of viewing the natural world. Warren views Callicott's formulation of Leopold's philosophy as doing a disservice to Leopold by misreading him as overstating and overemphasizing the concern for the biotic community over concern for individuals within the community.<sup>89</sup>

Using an ecofeminist critique of Callicott and his interpretation of Leopold, Davis contends that deep ecology

is infested by a macho mystique, whereby 'things natural, wild, and free' continue to be celebrated and phallicized as corresponding to the 'human' order of experience and idealized existence.... Homage is paid to the 'hunter-gatherer'

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<sup>87</sup> Karen Davis, "Thinking Like a Chicken," in *Women and Animals*, eds., Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 192.

<sup>88</sup> Davis, 199.

<sup>89</sup> See Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 159-170.

lifestyle, with virtually all of the tribute going to the hunter and none to the gatherer.<sup>90</sup>

Davis focuses her concern on farm animals, specifically chickens. Her interest in chickens grew out of her experience of becoming a vegetarian after she read two life-changing essays. The first essay, written by Carl Sagan, discusses the ability of chimpanzees to abstract, as evidenced by their ability to lure a chicken with food; for Davis, this is evidence of the position of chickens on the bottom rung of animals seen as having rights. Her other life-changing essay was "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair" by J. Baird Callicott, in which Callicott, drawing on Leopold,

[a]rgues that domesticated and wild animals have differing moral standing and that, similarly, individual animals and species of animals have differing moral statuses. Wild animals and species of animals have characteristics entitling them to a moral considerateness that is intrinsically inapplicable to the characteristics of domesticated and individual animals. The smallest unit of ethical considerability is the biotic community of which the individual 'nonhuman natural entity' is a component of value only insofar as it contributes, in Leopold's words, to the 'integrity, beauty, and stability of the biotic community (Callicott 1980, 324-325)."<sup>91</sup>

Like many of us, Davis gained insights and understanding through reading that changed her eating practices, but it was her direct personal encounter with a chicken she rescued that sharpened her concern and activism. Davis was living in a house on property belonging to a woman who raised chickens to be sold for meat. At the end of each summer the chickens were taken for slaughter out of the chicken house in which about a hundred chickens lived in cramped, darkened conditions. After this exodus, Davis walked into the shed to find one lone chicken hiding in a corner. Davis coaxed the chicken out and named her Viva. Viva was frightened and deformed. Davis brought Viva to live in her house, where the chicken displayed a personality full of curiosity and

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<sup>90</sup> Davis, 196.

<sup>91</sup> Davis, 193.



growing affection. Thanks to her interactions with this individual chicken, Davis came to care for the plight of chickens and other fowl. She has had significant direct contact with chickens that lends credibility and passion to her work as she attests to the worth of chickens and other “domestic” farm animals.<sup>92</sup> She subsequently founded United Poultry Concerns, a group that addresses the treatment of domestic fowl.

The issue of domestic fowl and factory farming is of interest because many people who verbalize concern for animals remark that they “don’t eat meat,” meaning they don’t eat cows. But they still eat poultry. This distinction is an important issue for those of us who are animal activists and are concerned about human-caused suffering of individuals animals in the web of life. Chickens have flesh. They have intelligence. They have feelings. They suffer in factory farms, often under conditions much more heinous than cows do.

Davis argues that farm animals have been taken out of moral consideration by environmental ethics. They are, she says, “relegated to the wasteland of foregone conclusions in which they are considered to be not only ecologically out of tune but too denatured and void of autonomy for human morality to apply to them.” She identifies two “moral arguments against agricultural animals.” First, environmentalists and animal rights advocates agree that the practices of agribusiness have an enormously negative impact on the environment: “The United States poultry industry pollutes fields and streams with 14 billion pounds of manure and 28 billion gallons of waste each year.”<sup>93</sup> I wouldn’t necessarily call this an environmentalist moral argument against agricultural animals; rather, it is an argument against factory farming, but I do know that the

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<sup>92</sup> Davis, 193-194.

<sup>93</sup> Davis, 198-204.

suffering of the individual animals is often not taken into consideration when the arguments against agribusiness practices are given.

The second moral argument against taking into consideration farm animals that Davis identifies is, in my opinion, more pernicious. Callicott, a primary interpreter of Leopold's philosophy and proponent of a biophilic ethic of intrinsic value, bases his own philosophy on Leopold's philosophical value of wildlife.<sup>94</sup> Davis cites Callicott as exemplifying moral disregard for farm animals and quotes him regarding moral consideration of farm animals: They "have been bred to docility, tractability, stupidity, and dependency. It is literally meaningless to suggest that they be liberated' (Callicott 1980, 330)." <sup>95</sup>

What Callicott is saying, of course, is that domesticated animals are created beings that bear little resemblance to wild or "natural" animals and are therefore not fit for moral consideration. But Davis refutes the notion that chickens who have been caged, bred, and genetically modified are without "natural" behavior.<sup>96</sup> She cites Dr. Nedim Buyukmihci, a veterinary ophthalmologist whose services are needed because some chickens kept in cramped, filthy quarters are now having their eyes covered with lenses to "calm their 'uneconomical' frenzy by destroying their vision." This practice occurs along with the debeaking and the battery cage. Keehl quotes Buyukmihci, who reports that

upon release from the cage and removal of the lenses following a period of adjustment, those hens in his care "would do all the things hens normally would if

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<sup>94</sup> J. Baird Callicott, "The Philosophical Value of Wildlife," in *The Animal Ethics Reader*, ed. Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler (New York: Routledge, 2003), 386.

<sup>95</sup> Davis, 201.

<sup>96</sup> Note that my computer's spell check program doesn't recognize "who" in this sentence as valid. It suggests the use of "that" instead. But "who" makes the chicken more real to me.

allowed: scratch for food, dustbathe, spend time with one another or apart from one another, make attempts at flight, stretch their wings and legs simultaneously, preen, and the like. Preening, of course, was severely curtailed due to the mutilation of their beaks.’(Buyukmihci 1992).<sup>97</sup>

These observations alone negate Callicott’s reasoning. The chickens engage in the behavior that any chicken not having been caged would exhibit. They are not “denatured,” unless nature is only considered that which is “wild.” This position echoes the hunting discourse that lauds an “untamed” nature.

Callicott’s assessment of domesticated farm animals is shared and even exploited by those who benefit from the continuing “production” of farm animals. Carl’s Jr. is a fast-food chain noted for TV commercials that valorize meat-eating macho men. One of the company’s commercials, which ran in the summer of 2005, exemplifies the disdain for chickens that Davis rejects. A clucking chicken walks into the scene while a Male Voice gives commands in a deadpan tone. “Chicken, speak. Chicken, speak.” As a large ball is thrown in front of her, the Voice commands, “Chicken, catch.” Then, while bowling pins are tossed in front of her: “Chicken, juggle.” Soon a large stack of papers drops down in front her. “Chicken, collate.” Finally the Voice intones, “There’s only one thing a chicken is good for—eating.” The chicken is then eradicated. First a black screen drops down and we see “Western Bacon Chickenburger,” the sandwich for which the chicken is meant. As the commercial ends, a huge sandwich drops down. Presumably it’s the chicken who could not speak, catch, juggle, or collate.

One of the astounding things about this commercial is that it shows us a *live* chicken. This is the *actual body to be consumed*. We may also remember another

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<sup>97</sup> Davis, 205.

commercial in which cartoon chickens engage in various antics trying to pass themselves off as “Foster Farm chickens” but escape the fate of being eaten because they are not “fresh” enough. The Carl’s Jr. commercial is shockingly honest. It shows us the *live* chicken. But the chicken stands alone in front of a blank, white background. There is no reference to her surroundings. Even though she is a live being, she is an *object*. And she *does* speak. She clucks! She speaks through the entire commercial. Carl’s Jr. renders her fit only for eating because she *acts like a chicken*, not like a human being.

Our conscience is clear.

When Davis submitted her essay, “Clucking Like a Mountain,” to the journal, *Environmental Ethics*, they turned it down. “Thinking Like a Chicken: Farm Animals and the Feminine Connection,” is her reaction to the editorial decision to reject her essay. In her epilogue to her essay in the anthology, *Women and Animals*, in which “Thinking Like a Chicken” appears, Davis argues against the reasons she was given for the rejection. Whereas one of the two referees, who “did not share the author’s views,” favored publicizing the essay because it provided a point of view not represented by the journal, the other referee opposed it. Davis claims that the second reader, a poultry researcher, “insisted that [Davis] arguments ignored ‘much factual information,’ for instance, that ‘it is in the interest of those individuals that raise hens in battery cages that the welfare of those hens is not so ignored that egg production is impaired’ and that ‘the industry has made considerable strides in determining the proper mesh size for battery cages to avoid leg entrapment.’” Davis further indicates that the second reader had determined that she (Davis) “implied that hens could care about the death of other

chickens and ignored the disadvantages of free-range production, making the imaginary viewpoint of a factory-farm battery hen via a human interpreter read like 'lopsided anthropomorphism.'" The editor of *Environmental Ethics* indicated that the article had been refused because it "ignored much material that readers of the journal are familiar with, including Callicott's 'Triangular Affair,' which discusses chickens in some detail, and Birch and Cobb's *Liberation of Life*, 'which specifically contrasts the lives of chickens with chimpanzees.'" <sup>98</sup>

In answering the journal's arguments, Davis refers to Cobb's discussion of animal rights in his book, *Matters of Life and Death*. As in *The Liberation of Life*, *Matters of Life and Death* discusses the experiences of chickens and chimpanzees, but not quite in the way that Davis portrays the discussion. In *Matters of Life and Death*, Cobb contrasts the experience of an oyster anticipating death with that of a chimpanzee's and a whale's experiences of anticipating death. Cobb suggests that these experiences are at opposite ends of the spectrum of animals' experiences. He then considers the spectrum of experience for gorillas and dolphins and chickens and sharks,<sup>99</sup> framing his discussion on the ability of the creatures to experience and reflect on their experience. Based on the ability of an animal to anticipate its own death, he concludes that in the matter of rights it is more accurate to speak of gorillas and dolphins as having rights than chickens and sharks.<sup>100</sup>

In *The Liberation of Life*, Birch and Cobb systematically lay out their discussion of the issue of killing chickens based on the process notion of intrinsic value and the range of experiences that creatures may have. They consider three conditions of

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<sup>98</sup> Davis, 206.

<sup>99</sup> Cobb, *Matters of Life and Death* 36-37.

<sup>100</sup> Cobb, 36-37.

experiencing. The first is that the killing of the chicken would prevent the chicken from having further experiences. The second is the ability of chickens to experience anxiety in anticipating their death. The third is that while the death of one chicken does affect the others in the chicken social group, “there seems to be little or no grief.”<sup>101</sup> Birch and Cobb assert that in each of these scenarios, the killing, if it were done in a humane way, would not significantly matter to the chicken. In this discussion, Birch and Cobb make the case that ethical actions must be based on not viewing animals as mere ends in themselves and must consider the animals’ suffering. They align themselves with Singer’s replaceability argument that I discuss in the next chapter, and with the United States Humane Society’s principles for guiding the treatment of animals in human care.<sup>102</sup>

The letter from the editor of *Environmental Ethics*, Davis argues,

“with its suggested reading, acts out my own analysis. It seeks to shut down the voice of the individual animal and author and to delegitimize me as a speaker who knows chickens in deference to the ‘experts’ with whom the world order and divine mind just happen to agree that animals humans like to eat (such as chickens, veal calves, and tuna) and animals who like to eat humans (such as sharks) have less valuable personal and interpersonal experiences and a lesser part in the universe.”<sup>103</sup>

Quoting Carol J. Adams and Marjorie Proctor-Smith, Davis continues:

[The] voice of the voiceless offers a truth that the voice of the expert can never offer (1993, 302).” This voice requires different language from the language of experts, a verbal and lyrical equivalent of the subjective and intersubjective experiences linking humans to one another and, through an epistemology rooted in our evolutionary history, to other animals and the earth. Significantly, the poultry science reference of my “Clucking” essay chides me with ‘too much first person singular’ and snorts that

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<sup>101</sup> Birch and Cobb, *Liberation of Life*, 158-159.

<sup>102</sup> Birch and Cobb, 159-160.

<sup>103</sup> Davis, 208.

“sixteen billion chickens cannot tell me the psychic price of scientific enlightenment.”<sup>104</sup>

Given that she has life experience working with rescued chickens and has done substantial writing and research, Davis makes a good point about the silencing of her and animals’ voices by the experts. But she misrepresents Cobb by failing to mention how strongly he (and Birch) object to factory farming because of the suffering and terror that farm animals endure. She is also unfair in her characterization of Cobb as handing down the decrees of the divine. As a theologian, Cobb was situating his discussion in process theology, which proposes divine *persuasion* rather than divine *decree* and, as we’ve seen previously, emphasizes that God feels the feelings of all entities. It is inaccurate to portray God as “handing down divine decrees.” All that said, while I appreciate the care that Cobb and Birch have given to articulating concern for the suffering that animals are subjected to (particularly their critique of factory-farming), and given that I agree that the experiences of chickens may be different and less complex than, say, chimpanzees, it is true that they do not take a stand on moral vegetarianism. I find myself in agreement with those process thinkers who have concluded that vegetarianism, in the context where a plant-based diet is possible, is the position that process thought leads us to.<sup>105</sup>

Keehl and Davis raise important issues regarding the inability of environmental ethics and deep ecology to consider the plight of individual animals. I share their

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<sup>104</sup> Davis, 208.

<sup>105</sup> See Daniel A. Dombrowski in *Hartshorne and the Metaphysics of Animal Rights*, 82-85, and Brian G. Henning in *The Ethics of Creativity*, 166-172. Dombrowski and Henning suggest that process thought leads us to moral vegetarianism. Henning argues from an aesthetic perspective that killing animals, including chickens, diminishes the beauty in the world (and the divine experience). While a chicken may not anticipate the loss of future experiences, her experience of pleasure is denied. Since most humans can subsist on a vegetarian diet, the thwarting of the beauty of the animals’ experiences is to be avoided where possible.

✓ concern. Despite Davis's criticism of Cobb, process thought can, as we have seen, offer a corrective to deep ecology's focus on the biospheric whole to the neglect of the individuals that make up the whole.

I have considered ecofeminist critiques of deep ecology in relation to concern for individual animals and how a process thinker engages both ecofeminism and deep ecology. Let us now look at an application of Whiteheadian ethics and animal liberation and rights theories and return to Leopold's land ethic in light of Whiteheadian ethics.



## Chapter 6: Whiteheadian Views of Peter Singer, Tom Regan, and Deep Ecology Land Ethics

*Whitehead's five tenets that make up an environmental ethic:*

1. *Each individual thing is irreplaceably valuable because each thing is a novel, creative contribution to the world;*
2. *Each thing is inseparably related to all other things;*
3. *Each thing experiences its own process of self-creation and hence is intrinsically valuable because of its self-significance;*
4. *The differences between things are due to differences in organization of constituent elements;*
5. *There is purposiveness in the natural order, a striving toward novelty, harmony, complexity, and intensity of experience, which is part of what we mean by the presence of divinity in the world process and which allows us to make comparative value judgments.*

—Susan Armstrong-Buck, *Environmental Ethics*<sup>106</sup>

Any consideration of caring for individual nonhuman animals in the interdependent web of life must include looking at the types of arguments for moral consideration in environmental ethics. In this chapter, I will discuss a Whiteheadian perspective on the prevailing moral arguments animal welfare and refer to Susan Armstrong-Buck's presentation of a Whiteheadian analysis of the animal rights position of Tom Regan, the utilitarian animal liberation position of Peter Singer, and Aldo Leopold's land ethic as they contribute to an environmental ethic. Armstrong-Buck's description and critique of these positions highlights the usefulness of process thought in thinking about the interdependent web and the human caused suffering of individual animals.

Peter Singer and Tom Regan are two of the best-known philosophers of animal welfare. Singer's approach is utilitarian. In arguing for the moral consideration of animals based on their capacity to suffer, he expands the thinking of the first modern utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), who wrote passionately about extending

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<sup>106</sup> Susan Buck-Armstrong, "Whitehead's Metaphysical System as a Foundation for Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 48 (Fall 1986), 242.

moral consideration to African slaves, children and, animals. Singer quotes Bentham's famous words:

The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned with redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognized that the number of legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a fullgrown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? Nor, Can they *talk*? But, Can they *suffer*?<sup>107</sup>

Singer, who made famous the term "speciesism" to refer to the exploitation of animals for human ends,<sup>108</sup> has made an important contribution to ethics and animal welfare by bringing our attention to the conditions of animals in factory farming, the fur trade, etc. He grants moral consideration to animals who are "rational and self-conscious, conceiving themselves as distinct beings with a past and a future."<sup>109</sup> Though this would include chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans, Singer suggests that it could reasonably be extended to all mammals. He proposes that animals whom we can suppose are not self-conscious in the way that many mammals are may be killed so long as they are replaced.

Thus it is possible to regard non-self-conscious animals as interchangeable with each other in a way that self-conscious beings are not. This means that in some circumstances —when animals lead pleasant lives, are killed painlessly, their deaths do not cause suffering to other animals, and the killing of one animal

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<sup>107</sup> Peter Singer, "Practical Ethics," in *The Animal Ethics Reader*, eds. Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 33-34. Singer quotes Bentham from *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chapter 18, sec. 1, n., the section called "Racism and Speciesism."

<sup>108</sup> Singer, 36.

<sup>109</sup> Singer, 42.

makes possible its replacement by another who would not have otherwise lived—the killing of the non-self-conscious animals may not be wrong.<sup>110</sup>

We can see from the conditions that Singer places on the way the animal lives and dies that this would make it impossible to justify raising animals in factory farms or testing products on them. Singer also contends that birds shot in hunting would not fall under the replaceability condition.<sup>111</sup>

Tom Regan's position is a rights position that grants animals moral consideration because they are "subjects-of-a-life":

We are each of us the experiencing subject of a life; each of us a conscious creature having an individual welfare that has importance to use whatever our usefulness to others. We want and prefer things; believe and feel things; recall and expect things. And all these dimensions of our life, including our pleasure and pain, our enjoyment and suffering, our satisfaction and frustration, our continued existence or our untimely death—all make a difference to the quality of our life as lived, as experienced by us as individuals. As the same is true of those animals who concern us (those eaten and trapped, for example), they too, must be viewed as experiencing subjects of a life with inherent value of their own.<sup>112</sup>

Regan distinguishes between what he calls moral agents and moral patients.

Moral agents can understand moral principles, whereas moral patients cannot. "Moral patients can do nothing right or wrong that affects or involves moral agents," he writes, "but moral agents can do what is right or wrong in ways that affect or involve moral patients."<sup>113</sup>

I have already discussed the Aldo Leopold's land ethic that informs deep ecology's biocentric egalitarianism. I now turn to a Whiteheadian views of these three positions.

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<sup>110</sup> Singer, 43.

<sup>111</sup> Singer, 43.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Warren, 79.

<sup>113</sup> Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights," in *The Animal Ethics Reader*, eds. Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler, 18.

Susan Armstrong-Buck considers Singer, Regan, and the land ethic in relation to these positions' usefulness in environmental ethics.

Beginning with Singer, Armstrong-Buck considers this position's ability to discriminate between preferences. Singer, she says, solves the problem by

making a distinction between persons and nonpersons, such that a person is a self-conscious organism, 'aware of itself as a distinct entity, with a past and a future... A being aware of itself in this way will be capable of having desires about its own future.' He then argues that while nonpersons may be killed when they prefer not to be, persons may not be so killed, because a person has desires about its own future.<sup>114</sup>

The problem with this, she says, is that there is no way to

decide conflicts between persons which do not involve killing, except by majority vote.... In addition, we have no satisfactory way to decide conflicts between persons and nonpersons.... This would leave individual animals deemed to be nonpersons with no morally based protection whatever from destruction motivated by trivial human desire.<sup>115</sup>

Armstrong-Buck makes the case for the superiority of a Whiteheadian ethic based on the notion of the importance of "actual intensity of experience," which serves an evaluative function. A Whiteheadian system, she writes, "evaluates a being's preferences both by how they contribute to the intensity of its experience and to the intensity of experience of other members of the ecosystem."<sup>116</sup>

Next, Armstrong-Buck looks at Tom Regan's rights theory, which is based on the notion of that all individuals have equal rights. According to Armstrong-Buck, Regan argues that animals are morally considerable because, animals are "subjects of a life," which he defines "as those individuals who can act intentionally and have a

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<sup>114</sup> Armstrong-Buck, 252.

<sup>115</sup> Armstrong-Buck, 252-253.

<sup>116</sup> Armstrong-Buck, 253.

psychophysical identity over time, etc.”<sup>117</sup> Animals, like infants and mentally handicapped people, fall into the category of moral patients rather than moral agents. “They cannot understand moral principles,” she writes, “and hence can do neither right nor wrong: they are the beneficiaries of the actions of moral agents. ... Moral patients with “beliefs, memory, intentionality, a sense of their own future (dogs, primates, cetaceans, etc)...are to be understood as subjects of a life.”<sup>118</sup>

Regan ascribes equal inherent value to moral patients, as well as moral agents (those who can understand moral principles and can act accordingly). He also recognizes degrees of harm whereby the death of a dog, for instance, causes less harm than the death of a human being.

Armstrong-Buck takes issue with Regan, saying that in reality we make judgments about inherent value when admitting degrees of harm. In turning to Regan to assess the usefulness of his position with respect to environmental ethics, she notes that rights theory does not attribute inherent value to those that are not subjects of a life, nor does it offer consideration beyond the individual. She offers Whitehead as a corrective to Regan, demonstrating that process thought affirms the inherent value of each entity yet distinguishes in degrees of value. Regan’s rejection of value hierarchy, she says, impedes our ability to make ethical choices in relation to the species and individual animals, trees, and wildlife.<sup>119</sup>

Finally, Armstrong-Buck considers the land ethic developed by Aldo Leopold and extended by Callicott. As we have seen, this ethic proposes the interdependence of ecological systems and the importance of the biotic community over individuals within

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<sup>117</sup> Armstrong-Buck, 253-255.

<sup>118</sup> Armstrong-Buck, 254.

<sup>119</sup> Armstrong-Buck, 255-256.

the community. As we have also seen, Callicott is critical of animal liberation and rights because of their emphasis on individuals.

Armstrong-Buck names three issues concerning with the land ethic and offers a Whiteheadian corrective. First, according to the land ethic individuals lack value “except insofar as they contribute to the system....” Second, she writes that

no value is accorded to rationality, moral agency, self-consciousness, religious insight, or artistic creativity except insofar as they might contribute to the community. This is a seriously counterintuitive result, since while such activities do often so contribute, we commonly value them as ends in themselves.”

Third, she writes, “no criteria are offered by which the community itself can be assessed, unless we simply appeal to short or long-term human interest.” By this, she means that the ideal set out by the land ethic has no empirical basis for judgment.<sup>120</sup>

Now she offers Whitehead’s system, which provides the metaphysic that the land ethic needs:

The better biosphere is one which best promotes the intensity of experience of its components. Such intensity requires diversity in order to allow intensely felt contrasts of data for each actual occasion; it requires stability to give emphasis to various features; it requires the freedom of adaptation necessary to bring forth novel feelings; and it requires integration to allow actual occasions to harmonize complex feelings in their satisfactions.<sup>121</sup>

With this one statement she articulates the five tenets of a Whiteheadian environmental ethic, which are quoted at the head of this chapter.

Armstrong-Buck’s issues with the perspectives she discusses echo those of ecofeminists Keehl and Davis. Concern for individual animals and concern for the biosphere need not be mutually exclusive.

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<sup>120</sup> Armstrong-Buck, 257-258.

<sup>121</sup> Armstrong-Buck, 258.

My own view is strategic and practical. Where rights theory and utilitarianism contribute to the mitigating the human-caused suffering of animals in the interdependent web, I am happy to employ it, but recognize the limitations that the perspectives have. Overall, an ecofeminist process perspective is superior in addressing the moral considerability of individual animals in the interdependent we. Allowing for the importance of individual animals allows their voices to be heard and cherished.

I now turn back to the implications for how we live and how we may hear the voices of individual animals in the web of life. Part Two will explore embodied ecological education.

## **Part Two: Embodied Ecological Education**

The analysis in Part One establishes a foundation for looking at religious education as embodied experience that can help us integrate insights that we gain through theory. By embodied I mean that the whole person is brought to the learning experiences. Embodied ecological education is education that uses multiple modalities to advance learning through experience in workshops, worship services, or outdoors (because I propose that ecological education can and should happen anywhere). Embodied ecological education recognizes the interdependence of all things and engages the mind and the body with movement, ritual, and song. Embodied ecological education is contextual. It meets the each person where he or she is on his or her journey. It helps us to connect to the places where we live and the practices of our everyday lives. Embodied ecological education can help us to transform the conversations that we have with the rest of creation and opens us to hear the voices of all creatures.

In Chapter 7, I suggest that religious education engaged in from the perspective of process thought gives us tools for constructing experiences that can bring about ecological awareness and consciousness of the suffering of individual animals, inspire action on behalf of animals, and offer support to activists. Chapter 8 explores the notion of the ecological self. In this chapter I make appreciative use of deep ecology, especially as articulated by Joanna Macy, to deepen our connections with the suffering of individual nonhuman animals. Chapter 9, titled “Implications for Living in Love,” is my



summary and concluding remarks. This chapter should be seen as an invitation to reflect on human participation in the interdependent web of all existence.

## Chapter 7: Process Religious Education

*When we are embodied, we become learners. We can learn from situations, from our experiences, from life. If we do not live in our body, which is the seat of our experience, we are only capable of rote learning and reacting in mechanical ways. Identifying with the life of the body, and less with the demands of society and our constant caravan of thoughts and fantasies, brings us closer to our unconditioned self. This gives us the ability to genuinely respond to life.*

—Richard Strozzi Heckler, *The Anatomy of Change*<sup>122</sup>

*For as long as space endures, and for as long as living beings remain,  
may I, too, abide to dispel the misery of the world.*

—Shantideva

As an ecofeminist process thinker, I am dedicated to working for the well being and flourishing of all life. Shantideva's prayer guides my work. It is to this declaration that I aspire. May I in even some small ways "dispel the misery of the world."

Each person must choose where to devote her or his energy in the work of ending needless suffering and bringing love, compassion, and justice to the world. While every effort is laudable and necessary, I am most concerned with ecological matters, with nonhuman beings in general, and with the human-caused suffering of individual animals in the web of life in particular. This is not to say that I am not concerned with human suffering. It is evident in this project that the concept of the interdependent web functions to highlight the interconnections of *all* individuals and activities in the web. As we've seen, ecofeminist process thought allows us to see a linkage between these issues: *we are all a part of the interdependent web of existence*. At the same time, I realize that these concerns often compete and are sometimes seen as conflicting.

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<sup>122</sup> Richard Strozzi-Heckler. *The Anatomy of Change* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1993), 58. This quote was sent to me by a friend who taught me much about loving the web.

In a discussion I had once regarding my concern for the suffering of individual animals, I was asked if, since I care so much for animals, do I also care for human babies? The simple fact that this question was even posed to me reveals a limited moral imagination on the part of the questioner. Care for nonhuman life does not preclude care for human life. In fact, I believe that to espouse care for human life without care for nonhuman life (both whole species of animals and individual animals) is a denial of our interdependence and is a function of the dualistic worldview that I have critiqued throughout this project. This dualism presents us with a dichotomy that does not in reality exist. The goal of this project is to highlight our interdependence and suggest ways in which we can overcome obstacles to the moral consideration of individual animals in the web.

Relevant religious education and experiences that help us connect with our interdependence in the web of life can lead us to overcome the worldview of dualism and domination that ecofeminist process thought and deep ecology seek to dismantle. While facts alone don't change behavior, this does not mean that education isn't an important source of inspiration as we seek to change hearts and minds in relation to human-caused suffering of individual animals.

This chapter therefore explores process religious education as a model and method of education that takes seriously our interdependence. I began thinking of process religious education as a way to educate for critical consciousness regarding the human caused suffering of individual animals in a seminary course on process theology and religious education in faith communities. In my ministerial internship, I developed and used a program titled "From Bambi to Wolves: Nonhuman Life and Animal Rights,

An Ethical Exploration through Film, Theology and Philosophy” to explore how ecological awareness and concern for individual animals might be fostered. My purpose was to advance concern nonhuman animals and inspire engagement in actions on their behalf.<sup>123</sup> My goal was to evoke in participants a sense of connectedness and compassion and the courage to act upon the sensibilities of interdependence. (Appendix A provides the details of the program.)

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the theory of process religious education. Next, I consider several methods of applying process religious education.

### ***Theory in Action***

In *Whitehead and Philosophy of Education*, Malcolm Evans identifies the postmodern process worldview as “an alternative context for education.”<sup>124</sup> Drawing upon Whitehead’s metaphysics, in particular the application of his philosophy in *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, and Griffin’s work in constructive postmodernism process thought, Evans identifies the shift that is occurring away from “scientific materialism”—and its attendant mechanistic worldview—toward the view held out in the Whiteheadian philosophy of organism in which “organism replaces mechanism and the metaphor of the machine is replaced by the metaphor of the tree of life.”<sup>125</sup> As we have seen this view understands reality as process, relations as internal as well as external, and creativity as permeating everything that is responsible for bringing about “change and evolution, even on the most minute scale.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> The program was originally called “From *Bambi* to *Jaws*,” but I changed the title for this project as the film *Jaws* was not viewed as part of the program,

<sup>124</sup> Malcolm D. Evans, *Whitehead and Philosophy of Education*, Value Inquiry Books Series, ed. Robert Ginsberg, No. 74 (Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998), 21.

<sup>125</sup> Evans, 21. Evans uses the term “constructive postmodern thought” to denote what I have been calling simply “postmodern thought.”

<sup>126</sup> Evans, 23.

Before I move to Evans's application of Whitehead, let us look at how Whitehead applied his philosophy in *Aims of Education and Other Essays*. In this work, Whitehead suggests that learning proceeds through what he calls "the rhythm of education,"<sup>127</sup> noting that learners must be presented with material that is commensurate with their stage of cognitive development. The rhythm of education proceeds in three stages, which he calls romance, precision, and generalization.<sup>128</sup> He describes the stages of development and the rhythm of education in terms of the age at which the stages are first entered, so that he talks about infant, child, adolescent, and young adult acquisition of each stage as tied into the grade level at which one finds these learners.<sup>129</sup> However, as he also notes the cyclical nature of the process of learning in which the stages of education are recapitulated in each cognitive stage, I believe we can see how the stages can be applied to new learning in adults. Whitehead is also quick to note that sharp divisions in the stages should not be presumed.<sup>130</sup>

Romance is the first stage in the rhythm of education. This is the stage when we first encounter a new learning, a new idea.

The stage of romance is the stage of first apprehension. The subject-matter has the vividness of novelty; it holds within itself unexplored connexions [*sic.*] with possibilities half-disclosed by glimpses and half-concealed by the wealth of material.... Romantic emotion is essentially the excitement consequent on the transition from the bare facts to the first realizations of the import of their unexplored relationships.<sup>131</sup>

We can hear in Whitehead's words here the sense of adventure that fresh insights bring to us. Whenever we encounter information that is new to us, we are in the

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<sup>127</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: The Free Press, 1967, originally published in 1929), 15.

<sup>128</sup> Whitehead, 17-19.

<sup>129</sup> Whitehead, 15-28.

<sup>130</sup> Whitehead, 27-28.

<sup>131</sup> Whitehead, 17-18.

stage of romance. We are acquiring knowledge, learning new facts. We take in the information without systematizing the knowledge. I can vividly remember my first encounters with Whitehead's philosophy. The worldview of his philosophy of organism was one that I had long held as an ecofeminist. But Whitehead is a difficult philosopher to understand. His concepts are dense. He created new words and used familiar words in unfamiliar ways. At first I had to let the words and concepts just wash over me before I could do any more than just feel them in my body.

At that time, I intuitively affirmed Whitehead's concepts. It was only when I entered the second stage, "precision," that I began to get handholds to understand the concepts. The stage of precision ushers in the systematizing of the facts gained in the romance stage, and the analysis of newly acquired knowledge.

The facts of romance have disclosed ideas with possibilities of wide-significance, and in the stage of precise progress we acquire other facts in a systematic order, which thereby form both a disclosure and an analysis of the general subject-matter of the romance.<sup>132</sup>

As I took classes in process thought and read Whitehead's work and studied him from secondary sources, I developed a schema whereby I could understand the concepts. One of the things that happened when I encountered Whiteheadian ideas is that they enhanced my understanding of the worldview of interdependence and radical relationality that I had held for many years. During this stage (and I am still in the precision stage in relation to Whitehead's more technical concepts) I made connections with what I had previously learned.

It is with our application of what we are learning where we enter the next stage. Whitehead lays out the third stage, generalization, for us in a succinct way:

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<sup>132</sup> Whitehead, 18-19.

The final stage of generalization is Hegel's synthesis. It is a return to romanticism with added advantage of classified ideas and relevant technique. It is the fruition which has been the goal of the precise training. It is the final success.<sup>133</sup>

In the stage of generalization we are able to apply the knowledge that we have acquired and systematized to other areas of thought.

I myself find evidence of this stage in the enterprise I am engaged in for this project. Whitehead's philosophy of organism and the worldview of ecofeminism resides in me now as ecofeminist process thought informed by my own experience. This particular articulation of Whitehead's philosophy and the work of the ecofeminists whose analysis I have incorporated into my own thought have led me this very moment. It is a moment in which the fact of my interdependence and feeling with other creatures inspires me to use the knowledge, analysis, and synthesis to create a work dedicated to ending the human caused suffering of individual animals. In the future, as I gain greater mastery of Whitehead and other process thinkers, my analysis will deepen, become more precise, and find wider application.

Evans provides an understanding of education from a Whiteheadian perspective through postmodern process thought, an articulation of process thought that I find also helpful. According to Evans, postmodern process thought will have the following characteristics and consequences for those who embrace it. He writes that

people's lives have meaning, there is satisfying participation in community, the environment is protected and renewed, an extensive spirituality prevails, reason is enriched by intuition, creative change is tempered with tradition, and human beings and all of nature are seen as a unity in a fragile biosphere.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Whitehead, 19.

<sup>134</sup> Evans, 22.

Evans also articulates the importance of the process model of education for highlighting the interdependent web:

Whitehead's thinking is that instead of educating to control and exploit nature, we should educate to live in harmony with nature...Despite the intellectual, verbal, and spiritual capabilities that differentiate us from other living things, we are in nature and inextricably linked to the biological and physical world around us.<sup>135</sup>

We can see that when it is applied to education, the organic worldview of process thought suggests that we take as our starting point our interdependence. This is why it can be called "embodied ecological education." The sensibilities of radical interconnectedness must be cultivated and *require more than an intellectual awareness*.

My years of working with chemically dependent people have taught me that facts alone don't change behavior. If they did, the person diagnosed with chemical dependency would cease his or her use of substances and embrace recovery. If they did, a person, upon learning that the Enlightenment legacy of individualism and the mechanistic worldview were predicated on faulty assumptions, would experience a shift in attitude. If they did, when that person adopts a new, relational view of reality, he or she would adopt a behavior that reflects that reality. We would live as if we knew our actions made an impact upon life on this planet. We would make compassionate choices in our eating and buying habits. But, alas, we know that these paradigm shifts are only slowly occurring. Facts alone don't change behavior. Knowledge alone does not beget wisdom.

Whitehead's distinction between wisdom and knowledge is important here. Admitting that knowledge is "one chief aim of intellectual education," he writes that

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<sup>135</sup> Evans, 24.



there is another ingredient, vaguer but greater, and more dominating in its importance. The ancients called it 'wisdom.' You cannot be wise without some basis of knowledge, but you may easily acquire knowledge and remain bare of wisdom. Now wisdom is the way in which knowledge is held.<sup>136</sup>

Elaborating on Whitehead's point, Evans writes, "knowledge becomes wisdom when its context is widened and connections are made that go beyond the immediate insistent facts."<sup>137</sup> Wisdom in this understanding would necessarily lead to actions that take our interdependence into account.

Noting further the distinction and importance of the effects of wisdom, Evans quotes Whitehead again: "Wisdom should be more than intellectual acuteness. It includes reverence and sympathy, and a recognition of those limitations which bound human endeavor."<sup>138</sup> Context and experience are components of wisdom that lead to making "choices and decisions that are right for the particular context."

It is my hope that educating for critical consciousness of the human-caused suffering of individual animals will broaden people's knowledge of the treatment of animals into wisdom, so that connections are made that lead to what I call *an ecological sensibility* similar to, but not identical with deep ecology. This ecological sensibility is informed by context. We consider local, regional, and global conditions. Remembering that ecological sensibility has been associated with deep ecology and biospheric egalitarianism, my usage here is even more inclusive. What arises out of this context as the reality of relationality is apprehended is concern for the biosphere and all life in general, as well as for the suffering of individual animals as they are affected by direct and indirect human activities.

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<sup>136</sup> Whitehead, 30.

<sup>137</sup> Evans, 76.

<sup>138</sup> Evans, 77

This ecological sensibility is both affective and intellectual. It is wisdom mediated through experience. Evans notes Whitehead's emphasis on the role of emotion in experience: "it is the emotion, the affective dimension of our humanity, that Whitehead considers the basis of experience."<sup>139</sup> In embodied ecological education we are moved by, we remember, we feel deeply, that which touches our emotions. Such experience lives in our bodies as well as in our psyches. Ecological sensibility can be fostered by such experience. Evans also notes the complexity of experience in Whiteheadian philosophy, saying that we experience visceral feelings, sense perception, the power of the past, and the lure toward future possibilities.<sup>140</sup>

I had considered vegetarianism and, what may be called moral consumption—the buying of cruelty free products—for some years before I chose to commit myself to those practices. I had heard about the conditions of animals in factory farms and knew about animal testing. Each time I was reminded of these practices, I had a nagging sense of discomfort. The discomfort faded eventually (actually, rather quickly) because I hadn't seen any pictures or read any vivid descriptions of suffering. No doubt because I donated to some environmental group or humane society and that information was sent to wider mailing lists, one day I received a solicitation from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). I must have sent a check for membership to them, (I say "must have" because in looking back I don't recall doing so). One day I received a copy of *Animal Times*, the magazine that PETA sends to its members. I looked at it. I read the accounts of the conditions of factory farming, how animals used in testing products

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<sup>139</sup> Evans, 80.

<sup>140</sup> Evans, 80.

are treated. I looked at the photographs in the magazine. The romance stage was ending.

At the time, it was part of my earth-centered practice to celebrate the seasons and work with them as a spiritual practice. Every year, as winter ended, I thought about the promise of spring, the new beginning and hope that it symbolizes. I thought about what new things—what ideas or concepts—I would like see in my life with the coming of spring. Each spring I created a collage with images and words that symbolized what I was hoping for. In the spring of 1998, I was looking for pictures to use in my annual collage. I had the idea that I wanted to bring health, beauty, and harmony into my life, perhaps greater clarity to my educational goals. I went through several magazines without finding the inspirational images I was looking for. I picked up *Animal Times*. I sat with the articles and the pictures. I chose pictures of farm animals and animals used for testing. I chose words like “cruelty free,” “beauty,” and “love.”

This was my turning point. I had not intended to focus on animal issues. I still barely allowed the mistreatment of animals into my consciousness.

I felt the love that I had for my feline companion, Lil’. I saw how responsive she was, how she had her own purposes and desires, how she seemed to want to be with me and enjoyed my company as I enjoyed hers, how she was frightened when put in her carrier to go to the vet. Certainly, what I’d learned about the intelligence of pigs being greater than that of dogs, what I’d read about the fear that cows demonstrate when they are near the slaughterhouse, the social structure that chickens have—certainly, I said to myself, the beings that are used for food and as test subjects must

have value as Lil' had value. Certainly, I said to myself, I had an ethical obligation to turn my knowledge to wisdom and action.

The Whiteheadian first stage of romance of bare facts had been integrated into possibilities that I had hitherto not entertained. Subsequent years have seen the generalizing of this precision in me into a wider and deeper analysis of the suffering of individual animals and the practices that cause them to suffer unnecessarily. My feeling with those animals has deepened as I have understood my relationality to be more than just an idea. Whitehead's notions of the rhythms of learning have played out in the unfolding of my concept *and* experience of the interdependent web.

Just as creating a collage brought me to my turning point, so can the spiritual practice of creating collage be one of the methods employed in embodied ecological education. It is to methodology that I now turn.

### ***Methodology***

The implications of taking experience seriously for education in general, and education for ecological sensibilities and care for nonhuman life in particular, are that we recognize that individuals bring many factors to their learning experiences. Each person has a unique response to any situation, including a learning situation.

Methodologically, this means that anyone creating embodied ecological educational programs must be open to emerging themes, build on prior experiences, offer varieties of experiences, and provide direction while encouraging exploration. For instance, in my program "From Bambi to Wolves," film was the primary medium and discussion tool, but I also used lectures and selected readings in essays and poetry.

Several other concepts from process thought and religious education help us to understand the methodology of process religious education. One such notion is teaching as proposing a concept, as developed by Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith. Durka and Smith consider "proposal" in its various meanings to articulate a model of teaching in which the needs, experiences, and relationships of the learner are considered and an investment in learning is stimulated. In addition to using the literal meaning of proposing, ("to put something forth"), Durka and Smith also use the analogy of a marriage proposal to explicate their notion of teaching as proposal. One component of a marriage proposal is "readiness," which is an indication that attention to developmental readiness must accompany teaching.<sup>141</sup> In the case of my collage practice, my readiness to see the suffering of individual animals opened me to learn more about the issues. If I were to work with that format in a class or workshop setting, I would lay the groundwork by introducing the facts and concepts by drawing first on what participants already knew, adding new information along the way. In the case of the program "From Bambi to Wolves," the method used was film.

Another component is aesthetics. As a marriage proposal should be carefully crafted and attuned to time, place, and language, so does teaching as proposal involve intuitive apprehensions. Durka and Smith suggest that teaching as a proposal, like a marriage proposal, commands that attention "be paid to involving the whole person." This is an important factor.

A rule of thumb might be: the greater the life investment called forth by a model, the more the total person must be involved. Totality of investment is essential to the movement of someone from the status of a student of

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<sup>141</sup> Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith, *Modeling God: Religious Education for Tomorrow* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 25, 26.

physics to a physicist as well as the movement of a boyfriend to the status of a betrothed.<sup>142</sup>

We can see from their analogy of teaching as a proposal to a marriage proposal that Durka and Smith's model is more than the mere dissemination of information. They call it a model of "creative co-existence." This creative co-existence implies commitment on the part of the teacher and learner. It implies a depth of integration that is transformational.

Further explicating teaching as proposal, Durka and Smith use the meaning of proposal as an overture made to obtain funding for a project or some other purpose. Here the proposal is carefully designed to meet certain criteria. It is expected, for example, to fulfill identified needs or requirements, to "make a contribution to the whole of society."<sup>143</sup>

In the work of illuminating the place of individual animals in the interdependent web, a great life investment is required to mitigate the human caused suffering of individual animals. Lifestyle changes are required. Eating and buying practices are examined through the perspective of individual animals' intrinsic worth and value for themselves. It is aesthetically more beautiful for animals not to suffer unnecessarily when other options are available.

Finally, Durka and Smith suggest that teaching as proposal highlights the notion of "learning as optional." Learning cannot be coerced. Education is the result of applying learning. Durka and Smith suggest that

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<sup>142</sup> Durka and Smith, 25, 26.

<sup>143</sup> Durka and Smith, 27.

The more a student can enter into the construction of the proposal, the more intrinsic to the proposal is the motivation to learn; that is to say, the more organic is whatever is learned to the be-ing of the student."<sup>144</sup>

For Durka and Smith, therefore, education "is for life and the enhancement of life...all information must proposed by teacher must serve the life process."<sup>145</sup> This model calls for the experience to be interactive, intentional, and open to the participant's experience.

I now give two examples of methods that can be used in embodied ecological education.

First, film can be effective in embodied ecological education. It offers not just the content of a particular film, but it also elicits responses from viewers who bring their past, their present affective and physical state, and their hopes for the future. Such involvement creates opportunities to explore the intellectual, emotional, social, ecological content of the film and to response to these variations of content.

Mary Elizabeth Moore discusses the power of the narrative method of education and identifies several themes that are important aspects of narrative and contribute to its efficacy in education. Narratives and stories, she says, "are an important source of imagination,"<sup>146</sup> "a source of human consciousness and social critique."<sup>147</sup> Story is also "a form of indirect communication that conveys truths that cannot be communicated directly," and, finally, "stories have the power to form and transform the world."<sup>148</sup> As a narrative form, film thus has the potential to function in the ways that Moore suggests as

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<sup>144</sup> Durka and Smith, 27.

<sup>145</sup> Durka and Smith, 86.

<sup>147</sup> Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching from the Heart* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 139.

<sup>148</sup> Moore, 143.

a source of imagination.<sup>149</sup> Showing films that convey the conditions of factory farm animals along with films that demonstrate animals' abilities to feel, respond, and enjoy their lives is a way to make real the animals that are raised for slaughter or used in animal testing. If the practices that contribute to human caused suffering were changed on a widespread scale, this would indeed transform the world.

Second, I consider worship and ritual to be a form of religious education and can be used in embodied ecological education. For the "From Bambi to Wolves program, I also created an Earth Day worship service that invited participants to explore their interdependence.

I am very interested worship and ritual both as a participant and a facilitator. Worship has the capacity to reach participants' aesthetic sensibilities and create an affective experience in them. Randolph Crump Miller captures the power of worship; I believe that his words apply equally to other types of ritual when he writes that there is "a hidden power in worship... It changes lives, transforms communities, and it opens up the possibility of the emergence of new values in the world."<sup>150</sup> Given its symbolic nature, worship, like any good ritual, has the power to speak to our unconscious, to our senses, to our connection with all that is. Miller again provides the words to describe what happens in worship. "There is an apprehension of a commanding vision," he writes. "This may be found in the scriptures or the preaching, or in any aspect of the total experience. The response may be a new sense of duty, a deeper feeling of reverence, or a new awareness of being loved."<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Moore, 139, 141, 143.

<sup>150</sup> Randolph Crump Miller, *The Theory of Christian Education Practice*. Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1980, 182.

<sup>151</sup> Miller, 182.



In worship and other earth-centered rituals that I conduct, I seek to create an aesthetic experience in which the music, the readings, the sermon, and the movement of the service or ritual harmonize with its theme. I seek to create a sense of community in worship, and sometimes I inject disequilibrium in order to offer participants the opportunity to move toward greater social, economic, or environmental consciousness. This principle is in line with the process notion of the need for contrast and the introduction of novelty.

Embodied ecological education, which process education is, gives us the tools necessary to construct experiences of interdependence that provide participants with insight and support for the work of acting on behalf of nonhuman animals. It is through new ways of being, seeing, and hearing that we will be able to apprehend our interdependence in the web of life and connect with sensibilities that can help us to apply those insights into efforts to end human-caused suffering of individual animals.

Seeing the self as an "ecological self" is a step into those sensibilities. <sup>It</sup> In is to the ecological self that the next chapter turns. ✓

## Chapter 8: The Ecological Self

*I think of the tree-huggers hugging my trunk, blocking the chainsaws with their bodies, I feel their fingers digging into my bark to stop the steel and let me breathe.*

*I hear the bodhisattvas in their rubber boats as they put themselves between the harpoons and me, so I can escape to the depths of the sea...*

*I give thanks for your life ad mine...and for life itself. I give thanks for realizing that I, too, have the powers of the tree-huggers and the bodhisattvas.*

—Joanna Macy, *The Ecological Self*<sup>152</sup>

While some human beings share ecofeminist or ecological sensibilities of our relationship with all of life, many do not. As we saw in my story about the opening of the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in Chapter Two, many who share these sensibilities in principle act contrary to them. How do we inspire such sensibilities? What prevents us from living in this ethos? How do we acquire the ability to enter into the perspective of another being? Embodied ecological education that widens and deepens the notion of the self is an answer that I propose.

Buddhist scholar and activist Joanna Macy's work address these questions. I consider her work to be embodied ecological education. She has worked for several decades doing what she calls the "Work That Reconnects" to bring about awareness of the ecological self and to support those selves in work for transformational change. In her essay, "The Ecological Self: Postmodern Ground for Right Action," she writes about a student named Michael who attended a lecture in which she talked about the actions being taken to defend life on Earth. She comments on the student's identification with the trees, an identification that functioned to extend his sense of self in relation to the

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<sup>152</sup> Joanna Macy, "The Ecological Self: Postmodern Ground for Right Action," in *Readings in Ecology and Feminism*, eds., Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 59.

rest of nature. Like other deep ecologists, Macy proposes that an “ecological sense of selfhood combines the mystical and the pragmatic.”<sup>153</sup>

This is a shift in identity that is needed to motivate action that can assure planetary survival, a shift that speaks to the sense of interconnectedness many of us say we feel. For example, I know that when I try to articulate experiences of I have of interconnectedness, I say, “I felt like I was a part of All That Is.” (Or something like that.) I don’t usually say, “I am part of All That Is and today I actually felt it.” So it seems that the shift must come in language as well as experience.

As she works with individuals and groups to facilitate awareness of the reality of the current world situation, Macy draws on systems theory and a Buddhist understanding of interconnectedness and interdependence to challenge the notion of a separate self that holds narrow self interest with impunity. She used to call her work “Despair and Empowerment Work.” Now she calls it “the Work that Reconnects,” a phrase that I believe more elegantly captures the essence of its transformative nature.

I have worked with Macy in a ten-day intensive retreat and experienced her work first-hand. When she encourages participants to identify and express their feelings of grief and despair over planetary conditions, it is true, as she reports, that people experience “a larger sense of identity” as the “awareness of the suffering of our world stretches, or collapses, the culturally defined boundaries of the self.” The experience of grief and fear that people encounter brings about an understanding of the magnitude of the potential loss and stirs a sense of compassion—which Macy calls “a suffering with— a care that extends beyond the self to a deep awareness of the interconnectedness of

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<sup>153</sup> Macy, 260.

all life. It brings about “a more encompassing sense of identity” that comes about through “owning the pain.”<sup>154</sup>

Whitehead allows for an affirmation of <sup>both</sup> the individual and the collective that leads to this sense awareness of the world, both its beauty and its suffering. A core tenet of process thought, as previous discussion has shown, is that the doctrine of internal relations and the fact of our interdependence leads to an enlargement of our interests. In the context of process theology we also understand that the Divine feels with the world. For Whitehead, God is the great companion, the fellow sufferer who understands.”<sup>155</sup>

Suggesting that Buddhist practices of wisdom, meditation, and moral action—nonviolence, truthfulness and generosity—can give rise to the awareness of our radical interdependence, Macy describes the vision of this interdependence in Hua Yen Buddhism:

It is imagined as the Jeweled Net of Indra: a cosmic canopy where each of us—each jewel at each node of the net—reflects the others and reflects the others reflecting back. As in the holographic view of contemporary science, each part contains the whole.<sup>156</sup>

Macy draws on Naess and deep ecology to articulate this reverence for life. Out of this awareness we move “beyond altruism” to a “deep ecology” that helps us to recognize our “embeddedness in nature.” We move beyond the notion that we are acting out of self-sacrifice, a function of the separate ego, into a widening of the self that encompasses all things. “In this process,” Macy writes, “notions like altruism and moral duty are left behind.” These are intuitions and sensibilities that are cultivated rather than

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<sup>154</sup> Macy, 261.

<sup>155</sup> Alfred North Whitehead. *Process and Reality*: ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 351.

<sup>156</sup> Macy, 264.

gained through obligation. "Please note," she continues, "virtue is not required for the emergence of the ecological self!"<sup>157</sup> She continues: "Sermons seldom hinder us from pursuing our self-interest as we construe it."<sup>158</sup> I'm reminding myself of this all the time.

We must consider what our real self-interest is, a consideration that is frequently expressed by process thinkers with the notions of internal relations and interdependence. Macy remarks that no one needs to be told not to saw off his or her own leg. So it is that the trees in the Amazon contribute to the health of the planet. Our very well-being is dependent upon them. "They are our external lungs."<sup>159</sup>

The ecological self is a metaphoric construct. It involves choice. When choice is made, Macy says, it is "an experience of being acted through and sustained by something greater than oneself...the empowerment itself seems to come through that or those for whose sake one acts."<sup>160</sup> Macy's concept of the ecological self and her suggestions to bring about the awareness of "interexistence," as she calls it, offer a way into the notions of internal relations and interconnectedness central to process thought. The concept of the ecological self brings about the awareness that talking *about* interconnectedness is *not* interconnectedness. It offers an opportunity to begin to experience our interdependence and to speak it as well.

One of the exercises Macy developed with others is called "The Council of All Beings," which first appeared in *Thinking Like a Mountain: Toward a Council of All Beings*, by Macy, John Seed, Pat Fleming, and Arne Naess. This is a powerful exercise

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<sup>157</sup> Macy, 266.

<sup>158</sup> Macy, 267.

<sup>159</sup> Macy, 266, 267.

<sup>160</sup> Macy, 267.

that brings us the voices of wild animals and names the destruction of their/our environment. Here is an excerpt.

Listen, humans, this is our world. For hundreds of millions of years we have been evolving our ways, rich in our own wisdom. Now our days are coming to a close because of what you are doing. It is time for you to hear us.

I am lichen. I turn rock into soil. I worked as the glaciers retreated, as other life-forms came and went. I thought nothing could stop me...until now. Now I am being poisoned by acid rain.

[I am bird.] Your pesticides are in me now. The eggshells are so fragile they break under my weight, break before my young are ready to hatch.

Listen, humans. I am raccoon, I speak for the raccoon people. See my hand? It is like yours. On soft ground you see its imprint, and know I've passed. What marks on this world are you leaving behind?<sup>161</sup>

This is a poignant expression of human-inflicted harm. I have great respect and appreciation for Macy's work and the sentiments of deep ecology that it expresses. It is life-affirming and life-changing. Her insights and her work can help those of us who want to live into the possibilities of affirming and promoting respect for the interdependent web of life. Expanding beyond our separate selves into the ecological self can, and sometimes does, bring us into the sensibilities that require us to act to end human caused suffering of individual animals but, as we have seen from the stockyards story in chapter two, it does not necessarily do so. We have seen that the concept of the interdependent web of life often does not include the voices of individual animals.

I participated in Council of All Beings at the intensive led by Macy that I attended. It was a powerful experience. No other person there took the perspective of an individual animal such as a factory farm animal. This is not a judgment about the sincerity or commitment of my fellow participants. I found them to be concerned about

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<sup>161</sup> Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991), 198.

the plight of animals that suffer from human actions such as factory farming and animal testing. It just seems that that such animals don't come readily to mind for many people.

To hear individual animals, we must listen with different ears. Karen Davis brings us the voice of the chicken.

I am a battery hen. I live in a cage so small I cannot stretch my wings. I am forced to stand night and day on a sloping wire mesh floor that painfully cuts into my feet. The cage walls tear my feathers, forming blood blisters that never heal. The air is so full of ammonia that my lungs hurt and my eyes burn and I think I am going blind. As soon as I was born, a man grabbed me and sheared off part of my beak with a hot iron, and my little brothers were thrown into trash bags as useless alive.

My mind is alert and my body is sensitive and I should have been richly feathered. In nature or even a farmyard I would have had sociable, cleansing dust baths with my flock mates, a need so strong that I perform "vacuum" dust bathing on the wire floor of my cage. Free, I would have ranged my ancestral jungles and fields with my mates, devouring plants, earthworms, and insects from sunrise to dusk. I would have exercised my body and expressed my nature, and I would have given, and received, pleasure as a whole being. I am only a year old, but I am already a "spent hen." Humans, I wish I were dead, and soon I will be dead. Look for pieces of my wounded flesh wherever chicken pies and soups are sold. <sup>162</sup>

Valuing the interdependent web will certainly lead us to consider and value the entire ecosystem, but it need not, I suggest, *must not* disregard or minimize voices of the individual "selves" in the web.

Having explored the concept of the ecological self—a self in which all bodies, including the bodies of individual animals, are taken into consideration in our understanding ourselves in relation to the rest of nature, and in which we are called to be present to the environment in its beauty and degradation—we can now expand our self-interest to nonhuman animals. We can imagine those interests rising up and using our voices to call for an end to human caused suffering of individual animals.

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<sup>162</sup> Davis, 200.

## Chapter 9: The Implications of Living In Love

*Voices are calling 'round the earth. Music is rising in the sea. The spirit fills the air, guiding my journey home. Where is the path beyond the forest? Somewhere is the melody we need. There is a certain harmony, even a rhythm in the trees, in the song that we've always known.*

—Jim Scott, UU musician

This chapter can be seen as an extended meditation on the how humans might more fully live with the awareness of our interdependence and the deeply relational world we live in. As I said in the introduction to Part Two, this chapter is an invitation. It is an invitation to imagine a way of being in the world that allows us to critically engage the choices with which we are faced each day as we attempt to live with the compassion, love, and justice. This chapter is also a greatly expanded version of two sermons that I have given over the past five years. The latest version, which shares the title of this project, won the Albert Schweitzer Reverence for Life Sermon Award in 2006. The award is given by Unitarian Universalists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, an affiliate group of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

In exploring how we might live more fully in affirming and promoting respect for the interdependent web by hearing the voices of those whose voices are not our own, I have suggested that when the concept of the interdependent web relies uncritically upon deep ecology, like deep ecology, it fails to adequately morally account for the lives of individual animals. I have suggested that process thought, which harmonizes with the concept of the interdependent web and other principles of deep ecology, can correct the neglect in deep ecology of direct and indirect human-caused suffering of animals. In so doing, it harmonizes with ecofeminism. Ecofeminist process thought provides models of



the divine that are accessible for people from a variety of traditions. Living into the fact of our interdependence is a source of spiritual strength and nurturance.

As Marti Keehl notes that the discourse of holy hunters often draws on tribal people's experience of nature, she also critiques the appropriation of indigenous people's stories. I agree with her. But I also believe that reading those stories from our Western perspective can help us better understand our place in the interdependent web. This project has been about hearing the voice of the voiceless. The intuition that ecofeminists like myself share with deep ecologists like Joanna Macy is that we do not just *hear* their voices. *We should be in conversation with them.* We understand that all of creation is speaking to us.

For example, Andean peasants who live in the mountains of Peru have a way of understanding and being in conversation with nature that I believe can help us as we consider the voices of nonhuman animals and the divine cry that calls to each of us. *The Spirit of Regeneration* was written by members of the Andean Project of Peasant Technologies, also known as PRATEC, a group formed by non-elite people from peasant backgrounds who were educated in the university to participate in agrarian development in the Andes. Over time, however, they moved away from the academic development model, one that has largely failed in the complex Andean locale. Instead they sought to deprofessionalize and decolonize themselves in order to recover their Andean way of knowing and being in the world.<sup>163</sup>

At the heart of Andean peasant life is an understanding of the world as animated and radically interconnected; this is a world in which conversation is

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<sup>163</sup> Frederique Apffel-Marglin ed., with PRATEC, *The Spirit of Regeneration: Andean Culture Confronting Western Notions of Development* (London & New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1998).

always taking place. In this worldview, humans are not separate from nature (in fact, such a concept is utterly foreign to them). The land is understood in terms of regions (*chacras*). The community (the *ayllu*) includes human beings, the animals, plants, the moon, the stars, the deities. All are understood as relatives and all in conversation with one another and with *Pachamama*—Mother Earth.

This conversation of the Andean with the world is based on seeing, feeling, hearing the signs of the rest of nature. One of the essayists in the book describes this conversation and nurturance:

For we [*sic.*] Andeans, the Andes is a world of affectionate conversationalists. Because it is love for the world which allows life to flow.... A prerequisite in this nurturance is that we all be disposed to listen perpetually and in each circumstance to the speaking, to the signs of each one.... Each sign in every moment is saying something to us and says something at the same time that invites us to give an answer.<sup>164</sup>

The conversations are a natural part of life. They are embodied. Another essayist writes that “the body in communion with its environment is the living body not separate from its environment, not external to it, but inextricably of it. The environment is not external, a distanced object of observation, rather it flows in and through the body.”<sup>165</sup>

This ongoing conversation comes out of love for the world as a part of oneself. It includes a deep listening to the world and a deep respect for all life. For the Andean people, this leads to wisdom. Conversation, then, is an attitude, a mode of being in unison with life. This Andean notion of conversation deepens and extends the notion, not only of conversation, but also of who our conversation partners are. To be in such a dialogue challenges us in its unremitting affirmation of the ability of all of the world to be

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<sup>164</sup> Apffel-Marglin, 106.

<sup>165</sup> Apffel-Marglin, 31.

in the dialogue, not just with other people (or limited to people we like), or companion animals, or Bambi, but all of creation in its sweetness and its fury.

The questions I ask in relation to this project are these: *Can we imagine such conversation? Can we imagine being nurtured by rocks and stars, mountains and mountain lions? What might stand in our way of being in such familiar conversation?*

Often the very language we use to speak of the relationship between ourselves and the world is that of separation and domination. *Us/them. Nature/culture.* It's a legacy of mechanistic science in which the world is made of dead, inert bits of matter by an omnipotent God who commanded that the world was to be used for human ends. We are inhibited by the ways in which we have constructed our conversation with one another and the rest of the natural world.

While this legacy has kept us from deeply hearing, feeling, touching, and being touched by the world, and from having that relationship as the ground of our actions and being, are we not more and more persuaded by physics and cosmology that ours *is* truly an animated and relational world? All of creation—from cells to the human psyche, from the cosmos to quarks—pulses with energy. With Life.

The Western mechanistic paradigm is beginning to shift. It is the Great Turning that Joanna Macy describes from an industrial growth society to a life-sustaining society. The shift is beginning to offer us an understanding of reality that is not so very different from the Andean worldview. Insights from science, from earth-centered spirituality, from deep ecology, from process thought and ecofeminism—insights from all of these movements point to that which many indigenous people have long known. We are no less interconnected with—affected by and affecting—the world around us than is

the Andean peasant. These new/ancient understandings of the world are pointing to such interdependence.

Biologist Charles Birch tells us that “every breath we take includes about a billion oxygen molecules that have been, at one time or another, in the lungs of every one of the fifty billion humans who have ever lived.”<sup>166</sup>

I breathe you, you breathe me.

Yet we still often only dimly perceive the intimacy of our connectivity. What might it be like for us to “hear into speech” the world that is around, in, and through us? To recover sacred speech? What would we hear? Surely we would hear other animals.

When we converse with the world, we hear the imbalance and risk to life that are part of our present reality. This means that we, too, must take seriously the lives of other creatures. To do so is to know them and to love them. To know, we must touch, feel, and hear those other beings and the land. Yet we have fewer opportunities to touch, feel, and hear than do the Andean peasants. It is this very distance that perpetuates the myth of ourselves as separate, isolated people. The distance numbs us to the subjectivity of other sentient beings.

For the Andean, the alpacas and llamas that they raise for wool and food are considered daughters-in-law. “We nurture the alpacas and the alpacas nurture us,” says the Andean farmer. Mating the animals is accompanied by a marriage ceremony in which the animals are joined, after which the community celebrates the animals’ ongoing contribution to the community. Such is the intimacy of the relationship and the

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<sup>166</sup> Charles Birch, *Regaining Compassion for Humanity and Nature* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 120.

sense of mutual nurturance. Knowing which crops to plant, and when, also requires an embodied conversation with the land.

For most of us, our relationship with the land that yields our crops and the animals that yield their bodies is distant, at best. We are unaware of the conditions under which the land is farmed, that it is covered in pesticides by the dictates of agribusiness. We are unaware of the appalling conditions in which factory farm animals are raised as meat, unaware of the cruelty to which they are subjected, unaware of their suffering. We do not hold marriage ceremonies when they mate.

Chickens are crowded into cages, their beaks cut off so that they don't injure themselves and one another as they peck frantically in response to the anxiety they suffer. They are pumped full of hormones. They live short lives of terror and pain. Many cows are butchered while they are still alive. The stun gun used to render them unconscious cannot always keep pace with the stream of animals being conveyed to the slaughter. When we go to the market and buy their plastic-wrapped body parts, we are removed from the being whose life was taken to feed us. When we buy beauty products and household cleaners from large manufacturers, we are usually buying a product tested cruelly, and unnecessarily, on animals.

Such, you might protest, is our life in the modern world. We are not agrarian people. We depend on others for our food and other products we need to live our lives. This is true, but it does not preclude our being in conversation with, and knowing, those beings we take in. It is through such conversation that we can nurture and be nurtured by them and through which our humanity can be realized. The facts of our

interdependence and the expansion of the self to include the environment in which we dwell bring us into that conversation.

For some, vegetarianism is a result of this conversation. I suggest that in the United States it is a highly ethical choice because many of us can live healthily on a plant-based diet. But awareness leads other people to seek alternatives to factory-farmed animals. I have a friend who chooses to eat meat, but does so while maintaining a relationship with the creatures whose lives she honors. She buys range free chickens and refuses to buy them cut up. She says she doesn't want to forget that they were bodies. She prepares them by touching them lovingly, thanking them for their role in her sustenance. She is in conversation with them.

Entomologist Jeffrey Lockwood, whose job it is to "manage" the grasshopper population in Wyoming, highlights the tensions inherent in farming in the U.S. Aware that his job deals death, he approaches it reverently. Of his relationship to the poisoned grasshoppers he says, "Perhaps my destiny is that of the warden, to ensure that these creatures do not die unknown by the hand of a dispassionate executioner. To be mourned is to have one's life—and death—touched by another sentient being. Perhaps that is all that any of us can hope for."<sup>167</sup> Hearing Lockwood's words, we are reminded that life feeds on life.

Whitehead wrote, "Whether or no it be for the general good, life is robbery." We could stop there to make a case for merely taking life, but he pushes us further. Life *is* robbery. "It is at this point," Whitehead adds, "that with life morals become acute. The

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<sup>167</sup> Jeffery A. Lockwood *Grasshopper Dreaming: Reflections on Killing and Loving* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2002), 45.

robber requires justification.” By being in conversation with life, we are asked to be accountable to Life, to justify the taking of life.<sup>168</sup>

And we know that there are differences between animals, between vertebrates and invertebrates, between those with greater or lesser degrees of central nervous system development. Yet these are differences in degree, not in kind. We know intuitively that nonhuman beings have depth and sentience that often touch our souls. Perhaps you’ve seen it, caught the eyes of another being looking into yours and been startled by the recognition.

There are countless illustrations of nonhuman beings’ capacity to feel grief and even make judgments. Elephants slow down <sup>to</sup> will rescue a fallen companion. They bury and mourn their dead. Hearing of these sensibilities in elephants, is it any wonder that when they are confined and away from kin in circuses, they sometimes rebel?

Many of us have heard of Koko, the gorilla who learned sign language and added words of her own. Perhaps we also know the story of her relationship with her cat, All Ball, whom she loved. When Koko was told that All Ball had been killed by a car, she at first acted like she didn’t hear or understand. Then a few minutes later she started to cry with high-pitched sobs. When All Ball’s name was mentioned again, she signed “sad/frown” and “sleep/cat.”

In an experiment, rhesus monkeys could procure food only by pressing a lever that delivered an electric shock to another monkey they could see being held in restraints on the other side of a one-way mirror. Eighty-seven percent of the monkeys

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<sup>168</sup> <sup>168</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 105.

refused to shock their companions. One went two weeks without food rather than inflicting such pain on another.<sup>169</sup>

There are innumerable other examples of nonhuman animals demonstrating a subjectivity far beyond that which we humans thought or even wanted to know about. I repeat these stories not out of a maudlin sentimentality, or to be mean or to shock, but because they tell us is that there is a level of the conversation we are not yet able or willing to hear.

For us, in the West, who live not with Andean sensibilities but in a culture that has shaped us to be removed from the cycles of life and death and nature itself, we can turn to sensibilities that inform our sense of justice. And it is our sense of justice from which we may draw to live into the imperative of interconnectedness. I believe that it is only a matter of time before that imperative persuades us to act on behalf of nonhuman life and to end human-caused suffering of individual animals. I call on Unitarian Universalists and other activists and people of faith to take our place among those who call for reverence for life, to take life sparingly and with compassion.

As in all things, there is no black and white. We live with ambiguity. We weigh the needs of growing populations with the habitats of other animals. When faced with a life and death situation, people would save the baby over the companion animal. But many will risk their lives trying to save *both*.

I claim no moral high ground. While I don't buy products tested on animals, I did not refuse the chemotherapy drugs that saved my life, even though they were no doubt tested on animals, and I am not at all certain that the animals were treated in a humane

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<sup>169</sup> Gary Kowalski, *The Souls of Animals*, (Walpole: Stillpoint Publishing, 1999), *passim*.



way and their suffering considered. I can only now witness to their sacrifice on my behalf and work to end the practice to which they were subjected.

I wish not to draw firm lines between the rest of the world and us; rather, I wish to blur the lines so that our boundaries may be permeable, so that we might see that our dialogue is reciprocal, so that we may nurture and be nurtured. How we live matters. It matters to other beings, to the web of life. Entering into conversation with the web of life means that we will be open to possibilities of relationship that are at once demanding and stunning.

But, you might ask, does this not mean that we will live with a broken heart? And I would say yes, for to enter into the experience of and with another is to love, and to love is to risk a broken heart. But the heart is redeemed, and the risk rewarded, and the love deepened by a richness and an intensity of experience without which we would most certainly be impoverished.

Let the words of Mary Oliver instruct us here:

You do not have to be good.  
 You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert,  
     repenting.  
 You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.  
 Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
 Meanwhile the world goes on.  
 Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across  
     landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the  
     rivers.  
 Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again.  
 Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
 The world offers itself to you like the wild geese,  
 Harsh and exciting—over and over announcing your place in the family of  
     things.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Mary Oliver, "Wild Geese," in *Owls and Other Fantasies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 1.

It is my hope that as we hear these words we are reminded that our place in the family of things is that of cohabitant, of co-creator, of lover. We are not alone in our loving. We are in conversation with all of life and with God in each moment of experience. We need only listen deeply, listen with our hearts and our bodies. Let us nurture all life and listen to those whose voices are not like our own. Let each of them teach us of mutuality, dignity, and love.

This project has considered various types of environmental positions and ethics to determine what perspective best takes into account the human caused suffering of individual animals in the interdependent web of existence. I have found deep ecology to be helpful in affirming the biotic whole, but found its neglect of the moral considerability of individual animals to be unacceptable. Ecofeminism and process thought both affirm the whole web, while taking fully into account individual animals. I have suggested that postmodern process thought offers a way to engage in embodied ecological education such that awareness of the biotic whole and individual animals may be taken fully into account. Such education is holistic in that it entails bring the whole self to the experience that such education provides. The results of embodied ecological education are compassionate actions to end the needless human caused suffering of individual animals.

Let this be our hope. Let this be our charge, Let this be our work.

## Appendix A

I conceived of "From Bambi to Wolves" <sup>as</sup> a program to raise ethical issues regarding the plight of nonhuman life and to consider the issue of the moral consideration of individual animal suffering through the use of films that we analyze through process categories. The program was planned for use in a Unitarian Universalist setting, though it could be used in other settings. My hope is that the critical analysis of the depiction of animals and the environment in film will encourage fruitful discussions of humanity's relationship with creation in general and animals in particular. This program is my attempt to stimulate compassion for animals and inspire actions on their behalf.

### ~ From Bambi to Wolves ~ Nonhuman Life and Animal Rights: An Ethical Exploration through Film and Theology/Philosophy

This program was first presented to the Monte Vista Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Montclair, California. My objectives were to gain insight into what could motivate people to act on behalf of nonhuman life and to provide opportunities for the development of insight on the part of the participants.

Film played a pivotal role in this program. As a narrative method of education, a film engages its viewers cognitively, emotionally, and physically and offers a focus for discussion. Two Walt Disney films were used in this project, *Bambi*<sup>171</sup> and *Never Cry Wolf*.<sup>172</sup> I chose these films based on their portrayals of nature and animal life. *Bambi* (1942) is a classic animated film about the birth and childhood of a deer that has been widely seen over the years. I chose it because most people first saw it

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<sup>171</sup> *Bambi*, dir., David Hand, fully restored version, with narrated interviews of Disney and animators. 1942.

<sup>172</sup> *Never Cry Wolf*, dir. Carroll Ballard. Walt Disney, 1983.

when they were children. Bambi is a cultural icon that has permeated the American collective unconscious. Everyone remembers the forest animals celebrating the birth of the “young prince” and mourning the death of Bambi’s mother.

*Never Cry Wolf* (1983) is a semi-autobiographical account of the experiences of a scientist, Farley Mowat, in the Arctic that realistically shows the natural setting and the lives of wolves. The issues raised in the film are environmental, ethical, economic, and spiritual. Tyler, the scientist (Mowat's name in the film), is sent to the Arctic to observe wolves to observe their impact on the caribou population. As Tyler conducts his observations of the wolves, he is initially faced with issues of basic survival. Then he is drawn into the lives of the wolves and learns that the wolves are not decimating the caribou population. Rather, the wolf population is being affected by the intrusion of modern ways. Tyler meets an Inuit elder who assists him in surviving and understanding the wolves. Whereas this Inuit elder represents an indigenous reverence for life, the pilot of the small plane who brings Tyler to the location exemplifies the disregard for the wolves and the environment found in the dominant culture. The nephew of the Inuit elder, who kills wolves to provide for himself and his family, is emblematic of the intersection of the indigenous and dominant cultures. Tensions arise as the ethos of these two cultures come into contact.

In addition to using these two films, I also used selected readings (essays, and poetry) to capture and convey ideas, feelings, and concepts that normal discursive language is less capable of conveying.

*Program Design*

I led the program in four two-hour sessions. The agenda included the lighting of the Unitarian Universalist (UU) chalice to ground the session in the UU tradition. The chalice lighting prayers and readings were in keeping with the theme of concern for creation and animals.

Participants had watched the films at home and had been given discussion questions ahead of time to consider while viewing the films:

1. How does the film portray nature?
2. How does the film portray animals?
3. What are the human/animal relationships like?
4. What value do animals/nature have? Why?
5. What feelings does the film evoke? Why?
6. Does the film change the way you view animals? How?

In addition, I chose lectures, readings, and poetry to provide opportunities for further reflection. Group discussion was recorded on newsprint and put up each week to track the previous week's discussion. While the program was originally conceived to include the opportunity to develop a worship service or ritual by the participants, the service did not take place.

### *The Participants*

Two men and two women were in attendance. One woman was a counselor with abused children and very involved with caring for animals. The other woman was geologist and professor. One man was a building inspector and an avid hunter. The other man was on disability and active in social justice causes. Three were members of the church, two of them long-time members. The new member and the

nonmember had been coming to the church for about six months and were very active.

## ❖ Session One

### *General Discussion*

I invited the four participants to talk about why they chose to come and to share their views of nature in general and animals in particular. Each person indicated that they felt close to animals and connected to nature. One participant, while sharing those sentiments, also indicated that he wanted to present another view. He wanted to challenge the anthropomorphizing of animals that he supposed would occur.

Our discussion covered the relationship of human beings to animals. The question of animal sentience was raised as determinative of value, and we also discussed the notions of hierarchy and gradations of value as they relate to intrinsic and inherent value. "Are animals moral?" we asked. "Are they capable of moral thoughts and introspection?" Further questions were raised as to the nature of feelings and emotions in animals. Evolutionary theory informed the discussion, with participants generally having a neo-Darwinian view of evolution.

The conversation next moved to human beings' relationship with the earth. "We have developed a technology of dominance," said one participant. Another said, "We have dominated because we think we're better than animals." Other comments were, "We need to be caretakers and gardeners of the Earth." "Most dogs don't piss in their beds." "Human beings are dominant because we have changed the environment." "Human beings can't be the top species." One participant linked

domination and control of nature with racism and oppression. The participants said that they felt that religious traditions contributed to such domination and control.

Overall, the initial discussion for the first session was lively and included a brief overview of the philosophy of nature in Western culture.

## ❖ Session Two

### *Discussion of the Film*

We opened the second session with a discussion of the 1942 Disney film, *Bambi*. The issues that emerged included its portrayal of nature, animals, human/animal relations, feelings evoked in us, and themes of the movie.

All of the participants had seen the film as children. Upon revisiting the film, they found it overly sentimental and objected to the anthropomorphizing of the animals. The view of nature portrayed in the film, they saw, was idealized and sanitized. The participants also commented on how all the animals got along. The only predators in the film were the human hunters. There were favorable comments about the beauty of the animation and Disney's efforts to make the animals' shapes and movements realistic.

Our discussion expressed appreciation for the ecological ethic of the damage that humans do to the earth. One participant thought that the film could teach reverence for life. The themes of the cycles of the seasons and life, friendship, overcoming hardship, and coming of age were also favorably noted.

All four participants remembered feeling traumatized as children when Bambi's mother was shot, but two people did not remember that shooting of Bambi's mother did not take place on screen. Each participant remembered how deeply

Bambi's mother's death affected them; they confessed that those feelings carried over into the present. This speaks to the power of the past to influence our present feelings. Seeing the film as adults evoked mixed reactions. Some participants thought it was a good story with good dramatic conflict. Others thought it was shallow and overdone.

### *General Discussion*

The ensuing discussion focused on views of nature and relationships with animals. I found that the discussion got bogged down and might have benefited from bringing in lecture material or readings.

### ❖ Session Three

#### *Discussion of the Film*

We opened the third session with a discussion of the 1983 film, *Never Cry Wolf*. Questions raised by this film included the interdependence of ethical, economic, and environmental issues, as well as spiritual themes and issues. The participants agreed that the film provided a realistic view of nature and wolves. The geologist noted that he had seen a realistic portrayal of "life in the field."

One participant shared her observation of the differences in the way the Inuit elder loved, respected, and even revered the wolves in a more impersonal way than the scientist's more attached love. Birch and Cobb in *The Liberation of Life*, an excerpt of which I read during this session, express these two experiences of love profoundly. Birch and Cobb present a notion of God as Life in which Life's care for each entity is characterized as both personal and impersonal, particular and indifferent. This reading was particularly well received.



### *General Discussion*

The general discussion in this session was substantive. We discussed the interdependent nature of existence and the interplay between economics and environmental issues. It became clear to me that moving to the particular concerns of individual animals and animal rights needs to be grounded in an analysis of nature. One participant stated, "The less involved we are with the environment and with each other, the more we are able to engage in cruelty."

I ended the discussion with by asking how we come to the judgments we make about nature. The participants identified five sources for judgments:

1. Experience
2. Science
3. Religious traditions
4. Cultural institutions
5. Charismatic teachers and leaders.

### ❖ Session Four

#### *General Discussion*

To open the fourth session, I presented a brief history of Western theological views of nature/animals. We then engaged in further discussion about how decisions are made with regard to the treatment of nonhuman life. In typical UU fashion, one of the participants said he hated to use the biblical reference, but he still saw that the biblical injunction to care for creation as a helpful concept. Another participant said, "Human beings are the only animals that think about being the top species."

As we moved to the question, *why do we or should we preserve other species?*

three categories emerged:

1. Anthropocentric: or the preservation of human beings. "We'll be destroyed if we don't."
2. Moral: "because we have the capacity of acting to a higher standard," and "we are deleteriously affected culturally and spiritually if we fail to do so."
3. Spiritual: "because we are interconnected."

The discussion now turned to the plight of the poor around the globe, overpopulation, and high mortality rates in the two thirds world due to hunger, AIDS, and climatic changes resulting in drought and other natural disasters. One participant said that extinction is a part of the history of the planet and that the human animal is as subject to that process as nonhuman animals. When she spoke of the instinctual aspects of human nature, I questioned her carefully to attempt to determine if she meant to imply that actions do not need to be taken on behalf of other human beings. It became clear that she is a person who is conscious of social justice issues and does advocate for human welfare. However, a tension exists in seeing the human species as no different than other species. The fact of our unique human consciousness—which gives us the ability to self-reflect, to apprehend our interconnectedness, and to make moral judgments—positions us as the only species on earth that can act on behalf of all life. The danger in leveling differences is that the destructive actions or dominance of some humans over other humans can be seen as *merely* a function of instinctual predilections that cannot be overcome even

if we wanted to. The argument for preserving other species obtains here. Human beings are capable of acting to a higher standard. Along with that comes responsibility for our actions.

Our final session ended with a discussion of the role that the Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes could play in making ethical decisions regarding nonhuman life. We focused on the Seventh principle: "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."

Finally, I handed out evaluation forms for the participants to take home and mail back to me (I provided a self-addressed stamped envelope for convenience). Three of the four participants returned the evaluations.

Between Sessions 3 and 4, I conducted an Earth Day service that included insights that I had gained in the course of conducting the program. Three of the participants were in attendance at the service and spoke during a time of congregational participation.

### *Evaluation and Analysis*

In this section, I evaluate the program in relation to the purposes and goals I originally envisioned for it. I analyze the effectiveness of my methods and program design. After reviewing the participants' evaluations, I also comment on my future plans for this program.

My objectives for the program were:

1. To raise ethical issues regarding the treatment of individual animals

2. To encourage discussion, using process thought, of human beings' relationships with all of creation
3. To move to moral consideration of animal rights in particular
4. To foster the development of deeper ecological sensibilities on the part of the participants.

The program met some, but not all, of my objectives. Certainly there was stimulating discussion regarding human beings' relationship with nature. I am satisfied that connections were made between economic issues and environmental issues. The participants were in agreement that human intervention has damaged the environment and jeopardized the future of the human species. In this regard, however, it was like I was "preaching to the choir," as one of the participants noted on his evaluation. These UU participants have ecological sensibilities and engage in greater or lesser degrees in activities that care for the earth. Only one of the three participants who returned their evaluation reported any new learning, but two of them indicated that they were reconsidering their views on the superiority of human beings over other species.

We did not engage the issue of animal rights as thoroughly as I had planned. I believe this occurred for a number of reasons. First, I needed to have laid more groundwork needed to be laid in relation to human beings' relationships with individual animals, such as abandoned or neglected animals, factory farm animals, and animals in laboratories. We touched on animal awareness a few times, but not as specifically as it could have been. This can be addressed in future programs if I include films that relate specifically to the concerns of animal rights activists.

Documentary footage of factory farm animals or animals in labs would be well suited for use in an extended program. All three participants who returned their evaluations indicated that the program could have been included more sessions.

People are reluctant to address the deeper implications of interconnectedness with nonhuman life and the environment. Economic issues, the suffering of individual animals, personal patterns of consumption—these are some of the considerations that we must take into account when we look at our interdependence. Moving to action takes more than hearing "facts," and the contextualizing of those facts so that they are relevant to our lives is also important. Expanding the program to eight to ten sessions and organizing it into three sections is a possible model. The first would look at nature and nonhuman life in general; the second, at human-caused animal suffering and rights issues; the third, at articulating concrete actions.

The most profound aspect of conducting this program is the clarity I have gotten on my own work. I now see my life's work as being guided by seeking to answer a question from theologian Virginia Ramey Mollenkott: "How then can we stimulate that delicate fellow-feeling, the connected awareness, that reverence that deals not death but life?"<sup>173</sup> Having this as my guiding question frees me, in a sense, from working out of the place of predetermined ideas of what others *should* do. That doesn't mean I don't have ideas of what I think others should do. It means that I see my role as making the space for people to come to their own conclusions and

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<sup>173</sup> Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. in *What Does it Mean to be Human?* ed. Frederick Franck, Janis Roze, and Richard Connolly, 208-209. (New York:St. Martin's Press, 2000), 208-209.

develop their own sensitivities and sensibilities. I really felt that working during our discussions.

Another area of clarity occurred through the discussion in the fourth session regarding human consciousness and responsibility for care of creation. I have been working on this issue for some time and feel satisfied that the process notion of gradations of value is the most adequate position. I believe we can, and *must*, eschew social hierarchies, but we must also acknowledge that which we presuppose in practice; i.e., we make distinctions of value based on sentience. We will save a baby over a dog, a dog over a spider. This acknowledgement does not diminish the importance of the dog and the spider to the interdependent web of life or to us as worthy of our care and (dare I say it) love. We can care about individuals and species and work to preserve diversity of ecosystems and species while at the same time allowing for difference. The potential results of leveling difference are too dangerous for human beings and all life.

In analyzing the efficacy of the program from a process perspective, I turn to Durka and Smith, who suggest criteria for judging a religious education model. The first criterion they identify is how well does the model takes into account difference in individual learners?<sup>174</sup> In the case of this program, all the participants were at about the same level of capabilities. I also incorporated visual elements, such as writing their responses on newsprint, both to capture the information and also to accommodate anyone who is visually oriented.

I do not believe that my program offered as much in the way of stimulating the participants' curiosity or luring them to new possibilities as it could have. While I

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<sup>174</sup> Durka and Smith, 88.

used story and poetry to engage the participants, I believe that the program would have been more effective if I had used more stories and art.

Also, the program did not have a strong enough affective component. The participants' emotions were not engaged fruitfully. They were not moved much beyond where they were when they came in. I should have adjusted the material to take into account the level of ecological awareness they arrived with. Here the program could have benefited from more explicit theological reflection. I did not explicitly engage in theological discussion in the sessions, other than to present the brief outline of various religious traditions' positions regarding nature and animals.

Developing the theological component further, and making space for experiences that allow people to glimpse their interconnectedness will enhance participants' experiences. In the future I will use process categories to introduce the efficacy of process thought in dealing with environmental issues, animal rights, and the development of ecological sensibilities. Meditation exercises, journaling, storytelling, music, images, and outdoor activities are helpful aspects to any program designed to engage participants affectively. This experience must emerge from the group. It can be planned for, but it cannot, nor should it, be manipulated.

As I review this program, I consider it a success. Not because it went as I had planned or even hoped. It did not. I have enumerated the ways in which it failed to meet my expectations and hopes. However, I consider the program a success because the participants found it valuable and worth their time. I consider it a success because I gained insights that I otherwise would not have gained. I consider it a success because I believe that there is more at work in the world than I know or

am aware of. I consider it a success because the participants and I named some of the suffering in the world, and in the naming brought those concerns to the forefront of our consciousness, and in so doing created the opportunity to be lured to live into greater possibilities for the healing and flourishing of Life, including nonhuman animals.

I encourage all who care about animals in the interdependent web to be creative and courageous in developing or sharing experiences to end human caused suffering of individual animals.



## Appendix B

### Inspiration for the Journey

Here are selections that I have found offered me hope and inspiration.

### **Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes**

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

- ❖ The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- ❖ Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- ❖ Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth;
- ❖ A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- ❖ The rights of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- ❖ The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- ❖ Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The Living Tradition we share draws from many sources:

- ❖ Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life,
- ❖ Words and deeds of prophetic women and men, which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- ❖ Wisdom from the world's religions, which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- ❖ Jewish and Christian teachings, which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- ❖ Humanist teachings, which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- ❖ Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions, which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

Essay by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott from *What Does it Mean to Be Human: Reverence for Life Reaffirmed by Responses from Around the World* ed. Frederick Frannck, Janis Roze and Richard Connolly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) 208-209.

This essay serves as the text for the sermon  
*Transforming Conversations: The Voices of Animals in the Interdependent Web*

In my peripheral vision there was a flash of greenish red, then a sickening thud against the windowpane. I jumped up from my desk, dreading what I would find – and, sure enough, on her side in the grass beneath my window lay a female cardinal. Nearby, her crimson partner stood his ground in anxious dignity. The cat! I made a dive for the open door, lured the cat inside with the promise of treats, closed off her access to the out-of-doors. And then I waited. And waited. Hoped. And hoped. I knew these cardinals were recent parents. They had nested in a bush next to my bedroom window, and often they whistled me awake.

Would this “royal lady” ever witness the flying of her young?

About an hour later, the one eye that I could see came open, staring at first but with a gradually returning alertness. Good. Then she began to turn her head, cautiously righting herself. Later, a tentative hop. And finally, with great suddenness, she winged her way across the yard, low at first but then swinging upward.

What was it that stirred and lifted within me at her sudden return to glory? And what was it that did an inner dance later that day, when I saw her and her consort darting here and there across the front lawn, teaching their fledglings to fly?

How to name that sense of yearning connectedness, that interwoven oneness, that goddess-ground on which all being rests, that surging energy by which

all things consist? I live and move within it, and it lives and moves within me, yet it is beyond my naming. Perhaps we might call it Love. Or Life.

To recognize and honor it is reverence.

To deny it is to delude oneself with the notion that differences like form, species, color, and function are ultimately important.

To deny connectedness is to deny reality. And that denial is merely a mistake, an illusion. Alas, however, in a world of diverse forms that certainly do appear to be separate and competing for scarce resources, the result of this illusion can be tragic. Inhumanity. Cruelty. Barbarism.

How then can we stimulate in one another the delicate fellow-feeling, the connected awareness, the reverence that deals not death but life? Here is our challenge, and it is a great one: to remind the human spirit that despite apparent differences, all of us have wings of one sort or another and are intended to fly.

Excerpt from *Is It Too Late?* By John B. Cobb, Jr.

The fact that the human psyche is capable of being claimed by truth and touched by concern for fellow human beings means to me that there is that in reality that calls forth honesty and love and strives against the retreat into security, narrow interests, and merely habitual behavior. This power works slowly and quietly by persuasion without calling attention to itself. We can conceive it best as Spirit.

It is the belief in this Spirit, the giver of life and love, that is the basis of hope. In spite of all the destructive forces we let loose against life on this planet, the Spirit of Life is at work in ever new and unforeseeable ways, countering and circumventing the obstacles we put in its path.

Since what makes for life and love and hope is not simply the decision of one individual or another, but a Spirit that moves us all. I do not have to suppose that my own efforts are of great consequence in order to believe them to be worthwhile. I can recognize that they may even be futile or misdirected and still persist in them as long as no clearer light is given, for I see what I do as part of something much greater, something in which all persons participate to whatever extent they sensitively respond to the insights and opportunities that come their way.

Belief in the Spirit is belief that I am not alone, that in working for life and love in hope, I am working *with* something much greater than myself, that there are possibilities for the future that cannot be simply projected out of the past, that even my mistakes and failures may be woven into a healing pattern of which I am not now aware.

Belief in the Spirit is no ground for complacency. There is no guarantee that people will respond to the Spirit's promptings in sufficient numbers and with sufficient sensitivity to begin the healing of the planet. But there is the possibility. The future *can* be different from the past. Therefore there is hope. Where there is life, there *is* hope.

"The Bird and the Machine" in *The Immense Journey* by Loren Eiseley  
 Quoted Richard Gilbert in *Building Your Own Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston:  
 Unitarian Universalist Association, 2000), 16-17

The author had been reading his newspaper at breakfast, and had come upon an article about the amazing machines man had built. As he thought about these machines and their likeness to man, he remembered something which had happened to him when he was a young man.

He had been sent to a deserted cabin to capture whatever he could find for his museum. With great difficulty he had boxed one bird...He was a sparrow hawk and a fine young male in the prime of life. I was sorry not to catch the pair of them, but as I dripped blood from my wounded thumb, and folded his wings back carefully, I had to admit the two of them might have been more than I could have handled. The little fellow had saved his mate by diverting me, and that was that. He was born to it, and made no outcry now, resting in my hand hopelessly, but peering toward me with a fierce, almost indifferent glance. He neither gave nor expected mercy.

In the morning...I was up early and brought the box in which the little hawk was imprisoned out onto the grass, where I was building a cage. A wind as cool as a mountain spring ran over the grass and stirred my hair. It was a fine day to be alive. I looked up and all around and at the hole in the roof out of which the other little hawk had fled. There was no sign of her anywhere that I could see. Probably in the next county by now, I thought cynically, but decided I'd have a look at my last night's capture.

Secretively...I opened the box...I got him out...with his wings folded properly...I saw him look a last look away beyond me into a sky so full of light I could not follow his gaze...I suppose then I must have had an idea of what I was going to do, but I never let it come into my consciousness...I just reached out and I laid the hawk on the grass...He lay there a long minute without hope...He just lay there with his breast against the grass. In the next second after that long minute, he was gone...Like a flicker of light, he had vanished with my eyes full on him...He was gone, straight into that towering emptiness of light and crystal that my eyes could scarcely bear to penetrate. For another long minute there was silence. I could not see him. The light was too intense. Then far up somewhere, a cry came ringing down.

I was a young man then and had seen little of the world, but when I heard that cry, my heart turned over. It was not the cry of the hawk I had captured, for by shifting my position against the sun, I was now seeing further up. Straight out of the sun's eye, where she must have been soaring restlessly above us for untold hours, hurtled his mate. And from far up, rising from peak to peak of the summits over us, came a cry of such unutterable and ecstatic joy that it sounds down across the years and tingles among the cups on my quiet breakfast table...I saw them both now. He was rising fast to meet her. They met in a great soaring gyre that turned to a whirling circle and a dance of wings. Once more, just once, their two voices joined in a harsh wild medley of question and response, struck and echoed against the pinnacles of the valley. Then they were gone forever somewhere into those upper regions beyond the eyes of men.

“What next in the attributes of machines?” my morning headline runs. “It might be that power to reproduce themselves...It does not seem that there is anything in the behavior of the human being which is essentially impossible for science to duplicate and synthesize. On the other hand...” On the other hand...Ah, my mind takes up, on the other hand the machine does not bleed, ache, hang for hours in the empty sky in a torment of hope to learn the fate of another machine, nor does it cry out for joy, nor dance in the air with the fierce passion of a bird. Far off, over a distance greater than space, that remote cry from the heart of heaven makes a faint buzzing among my breakfast dishes and passes on and away.



### **Responsive Reading for Blessing of the Animals**

On this day we come together with joy in our hearts  
*And a sanctuary full of animals*

On this day we come together to celebrate  
*The web of life*

On this day we come together to honor  
*Beloved animals that enrich our lives in so many ways*

On this day we come together to share  
*Our animal companions and their stories*

On this day we come together to acknowledge  
*The sacred importance all living creatures*

On this day we come together to affirm  
*Our role as guardians and custodians of these beings*

On this day we come together to bless  
*And be blessed by these furry, feathered, scaly beings*

(All) With whom we share this Earth.

Beth A. Johnson

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